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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Home guard kills wife, daughter & cousin in Bengaluru

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

A man has been arrested for allegedly killing his wife, daughter, and a cousin at Jalahalli Cross in the city on Wednesday, police said. According to the police, Gangaraju bludgeoned his wife and the other victims. After the crime, he fled, leaving the house in a pool of blood, they added. Upon receiving information, a manhunt was launched and the accused was apprehended, police said. They added that Gangaraju worked as a security guard. The reason behind the brutal murders is not yet known. —PTI

'All hell will break out': Trump warns Hamas

WASHINGTON, 8 JAN

US President-elect Donald Trump has warned that "all hell will break out in the Middle East" if the hostages being held by Hamas are not released by Inauguration Day. Trump did not elaborate on what actions he might take if the captives are not released by the time he takes office. Officials say about 100 hostages, including some Americans, who were seized on 7 October, 2023, remain captive in Gaza, though they believe many of them may have died in captivity. "All hell will break out. If those hostages aren't back, I don't want to hurt your negotiation, if they're not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East," Trump told reporters at a news conference in Mar-a-Lago, Florida. Trump will be sworn in on 20 January as the 47th President of the United States. —*PTI*

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HC bins central, state rules on Green Energy Open Access

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

High Court has invalidated the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022, formulated by the Central Government for the generation, purchase, and consumption of renewable energy. The Court ruled that the Centre lacked the authority under the Electricity Act, 2003, to frame such rules, as the Act specifically grants this power to the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC). Justice NS Sanjay Gowda noted that the Act was designed to ensure that regulatory powers, including tariff determination and open access provisions, are handled by independent bodies like the KERC, free from governmental interference.—*PTI*

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Allies turn on Cong as TMC backs AAP in Delhi

This is after SP backed AAP amid calls for Didi to helm INDIA

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

In a growing rift within the Opposition INDIA, TMC extended its support to AAP ahead of the Delhi Assembly elections on Wednesday, isolating Congress further. The move came after SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav backed AAP.

Congress, which is contesting all 70 seats in Delhi, now finds itself in a lonely battle against its allies within the INDIA bloc. Despite both Congress and AAP being part of the broader national alliance, the two parties are in direct competition in the national capital, creating a significant rift in their alliance.

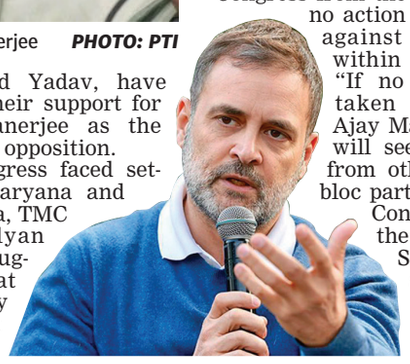
Arvind Kejriwal took to social media to express his gratitude to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her support. In a post on X, Kejriwal said, "I am personally grateful to Mamta Didi. Thank you, Didi. You have always supported and blessed us in our good and bad times."

Arvind Kejriwal thanked West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

Senior TMC leader Derek O'Brien also echoed this sentiment, stating, "We have your back @AamAadmiParty."

Mamata Banerjee's move signals a deeper divide within the INDIA alliance, with increasing pressure on Congress to recognise her leadership. Several key figures within the Opposition bloc, including NCP leader Sharad Pawar and RJD Chief Lalu Prasad Yadav, have expressed their support for Mamata Banerjee as the leader of the opposition.

After Congress faced setbacks in Haryana and Maharashtra, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee suggested that the party should "set aside its ego" and back Mamata as the leader of the INDIA bloc. "The Congress has failed to achieve the desired result in both Haryana and Maharashtra," Banerjee remarked.



In another development, AAP had already put pressure on Congress after a sharp remark from Congress leader Ajay Maken, who had called Kejriwal "anti-national." AAP leader Sanjay Singh announced that the party would push to remove Congress from the alliance if no action was taken against Maken within 24 hours. "If no action is taken against Ajay Maken, AAP will seek support from other INDIA bloc parties to oust Congress from the alliance," Singh had said.

—*PTI*

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A NEW DAWN

CM Siddaramaiah gives roses and a copy of the Constitution to Maoists after they surrendered and returned in Bengaluru on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

6 Naxals surrender, CM welcomes them with roses

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Six hardcore Naxalites on Wednesday surrendered before Chief Minister Siddaramaiah.

According to the information received, the Naxalites were from Karnataka and neighbouring Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

While Sundari Kutluru, Latha Mundagaru, Marappa Aroli and Vanajakshi Balehole are from Karnataka, Jisha is from Wayanad in Kerala, and K Vasanth from Arcot in Tamil Nadu.

These Naxalites had met some progressive groups in the last few months and finally decided to surrender, sources said.

They were involved in many crimes and were carrying rewards on their heads, the sources added.

They were supposed to surrender in Chikkamagaluru but later the venue was shifted to Krishna, the office-residence of the Chief Minister here.

As a symbol of giving up their armed struggle, Latha Mundagaru handed over her Naxal uniform to the Chief Minister along with a copy of her memorandum.

Siddaramaiah welcomed the ultra and her five associates by giving them roses and copies of the Constitution. Their surrender comes a week after Siddaramaiah appealed to the members of outlawed outfit to shun violence and join the democratic mainstream. He said the government has formulated a surrender policy, which will be simplified and implemented effectively. On 20 November, a top member of the outlawed unit, Vikram Gowda, was killed in an encounter with the anti-Naxal Force in Udupi district, pointing to the active Naxal activities in the State. —*PTI*

Oppn opposes ONOE in 1st JPC meet

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

A robust exchange of contesting views on Wednesday marked the first meeting of the 39-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) scrutinising two bills on conducting simultaneous polls.

While Opposition members termed the concept as an attack on the basic fabric of the Constitution and federalism, BJP MPs hailed it as reflective of popular opinion.

The MPs attending the JPC meeting expressed their views and asked questions following a presentation by the Ministry of Law and Justice on the provisions of the bills and the rationale guiding them.

A number of Opposition MPs, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, questioned the claim that simultaneous polls will reduce expenditure. They asked if any estimate was made following the 2004 Lok Sabha elections when EVMs were used for the first time in all 543 seats and are believed to have brought down the cost incurred. BJP MPs countered the charge that the One Nation One Election proposal flouted constitutional values by requiring an early dissolution of several state assemblies and locking their term with the Lok Sabha's. Sanjay Jaiswal asked if then president Rajendra Prasad and eminent lawmakers acted in violation of the Constitution when seven state assemblies were dissolved early in 1957 to ensure all state elections are held alongside the national elections. VD Sharma also said the idea of simultaneous elections was reflective of the popular will. He said a high-level committee headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind had consulted over 25,000 members of the public, with an overwhelming majority supporting the idea. —*PTI*

3 Mysuru prisoners die after drinking essence for a high

MYSURU, 8 JAN

Three young inmates of Mysuru Central Prison, undergoing treatment for illness at KR Hospital following complaints of stomach pain, died after 10 days of admission.

Police said the deceased are Ramesh of Hassan, Nagaraj of Chamarajanagar and Madesh from Sathagalli in the city.

According to officers, the inmates worked in the bakery unit of the jail. On 28 December, while preparing cakes for New Year celebrations, they consumed essence in different quantities in their attempts to get a high. They did not reveal it to health authorities until their condition deteriorated.

The trio developed severe stomach pain and were initially treated at a prison hospital. As their condition worsened, they were shifted to KR Hospital, where they revealed to the doctor about consuming the essence, the officers said. While Nagaraj and Madesh died on Tuesday, Ramesh died on Wednesday morning.

Following the incident, the prisoners' families have questioned the safety measures and care provided within the Mysuru jail. Nagaraj's relative Mallu said he received information that his uncle was admitted to KR hospital for treatment for kidney failure. —*Salar News*

6 DIE IN TIRUPATI STAMPEDE

HYDERABAD, 8 JAN

Six people died and six were injured following a stampede in Tirupati during the distribution of tokens for Vaikunta Dwara Darsanam of Lord Venkateshwara Temple in Tirumala on Wednesday. Around 4,000 devotees had queued up at ticketing centers in Tirupati since Wednesday morning for Vaikuntha Dwara Darshan tickets. "Three women and a man died in the stampede," an official said. Videos of police administering CPR on devotees went viral. —*Agencies*

India denies visa to Pak Kho Kho teams

NEW DELHI, 9 JAN

Ahead of Kho-Kho World Cup inaugural, reports indicate that the Ministry of External Affairs is yet to approve Pakistan's men's and women's teams visa applications, putting their participation in doubt.

The event will be held at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium from 13–19 January. BJP leader and President Sushanshu Mittal, of the Kho-Kho Federation, said, "Pakistan teams is still awaiting their visas."

The tournament had originally scheduled a much-anticipated India-Pakistan match for the opening, but with the visa approval pending, the clash is cancelled. Now, India will face Nepal in the first match.

The tournament will continue with 39 teams instead of 40. The men's event begins on 13 January with India vs Nepal, and the league stage concludes on 16 January, with the final on 19 January. The women's tournament kicks off with England vs Australia on 13 January. —*Agencies*

RONA, SUDHIR GET BAIL IN ELGAR CASE AFTER 6 YRS

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Bombay High Court on Wednesday granted bail to researcher Rona Wilson and activist Sudhir Dhawale, arrested in the Elgar Parishad–Maoist links case, noting that they have been in jail since 2018 and the trial was yet to start.

A division bench of Justices AS Gadkari and Kamal Khata said the two had spent more than six years in jail as under-trial prisoners.

The NIA, the prosecution agency, did not seek a stay to the order.

Wilson and Dhawale have been directed to submit a surety of Rs 1 lakh each, and appear before the special NIA court for the trial hearing. —*PTI*

FOR GOVT WORKERS

MSIL enters tourism; North trip for ₹20K

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil on Wednesday unveiled a range of travel packages, marking a milestone for state government enterprise Mysore Sales International Ltd (MSIL).

The MSIL has taken a significant leap by venturing into the public tourism sector. It used to conduct study tours exclusively for government officials over the past two decades, the ministry said in a statement.

Patil said the MSIL's offerings blend affordability with quality, besides ensuring safety, comfort and reliability for the public.

"MSIL's reputation as a government enterprise ensures trust and reliability, and is likely to make it a preferred choice for Indian families. With this foray into public tourism, MSIL aims to redefine affordable travel while upholding the highest standards of service", he said.

MSIL has charted out a plan aiming to increase its annual transactions to Rs 5,000 crore from the current Rs 250 crore *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

For individual travellers, particularly senior citizens, MSIL offers a door-to-door service, including pick-up and drop-off at their residences. Each trip is accompanied by an MSIL attendant who provides continuous care and support throughout the journey, said Patil. The MSIL also offers an EMI option. People can pay for fixed-destination packages in instalments, said the release. In another scheme, government employees can pay 50 per cent upfront and the rest post-travel, said Patil. The minister also said that tour packages for lower middle class segment are made affordable by combining train and local bus travel. For instance, a 15 to 18-day North India tour costs under Rs 20,000 per person, including meals. In addition, the MSIL has charted out a plan aiming to increase its annual transactions to Rs 5,000 crore from the current Rs 250 crore. The initiative will be launched by the Chief Minister soon, said Patil. —*PTI*

Airlines may soon have to share weather data with IMD

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

The government is planning to make it mandatory for domestic airlines to share weather data captured by aircraft during takeoffs and landings with the weather office, which could lead to significantly better forecasts.

Currently, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) launches weather balloons from 50–60 stations to collect critical data on temperature, humidity and wind speed at various altitudes.

However, inputs from aircraft could increase exponentially the accuracy of forecasts as the country records more than 6,000 takeoffs and landings by domestic airlines at various airports every day. M Ravichandran, secretary in the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences, said his ministry had been in discussions with the civil aviation ministry on the matter, and providing weather data would be "made mandatory for domestic airlines within a year". "It has to be mandatory... It will not only be very useful for airline operations but also for weather forecasts everywhere," he said. Ravichandran said weather forecasts depended largely on the number of observations collected. With new airports coming up in different parts of the country, the weather office could have access to data from a wider geographical region, he said. —*PTI*

3 youths drown while swimming in Mangaluru

MANGALURU, 8 JAN

Three youth drowned while swimming near Kulai Jetty here, said the police on Wednesday. Four friends had visited the Surathkal beach for an outing when three of them were swept away. Local fishermen managed to rescue one of them. The incident occurred at around 4pm on Wednesday, they said. A case has been registered. Investigation is underway —*PTI*

Tuition teacher held for eloping with minor student

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

A tuition teacher was arrested after eloping with his minor student in Mandya two months ago, police said on Wednesday. Based on a complaint filed by the girl's parents, a case of kidnapping was registered against Abhishek Gowda in Mandya. Police sources revealed that the accused is married and has a two-year-old child. Deputy Commissioner of Police (South Division) Lokesh B J said that on 23 November, the minor girl was kidnapped, and a case was registered at the JP Nagar police station."The girl was rescued on 5 January from Malavalli Taluk in Mandya district. She had been kidnapped by her tuition teacher, whom she visited daily for classes," police said. The accused, a 25-year-old man, has been arrested and allegedly charged with kidnapping and rape —*PTI*

Kolar woman in trouble over manual scavenging

CHINTAMANI, 8 JAN

Chintamani Municipal Corporation (CMC) filed a complaint with the police against a woman in Venkatagiri Extension for hiring private individuals to engage in manual scavenging, a practice strictly prohibited by law. According to the complaint, the woman opted to clear a clogged manhole in front of her house manually, bypassing the civic authorities who could have used jet machines for the task. A resident, who witnessed the act, filmed the incident and reported it to the municipal authorities. Chintamani Municipal Commissioner Chalapathy confirmed that employing people to manually clean manholes is against the rules. He stated that the civic body has jet machines available for clearing clogged manholes, and the public is urged to contact the authorities for such services to ensure safety. The incident raised concerns about the safety of the workers involved, as one person was reportedly made to enter the manhole without any protective measures, putting their life at risk. Two others were observed standing near the manhole during the operation. —*Salar News*

Sri Krishna Matha's Saptotsava to be held from 9 Jan

UDUPI, 8 JAN

The annual Saptotsava celebrations of Sri Krishna Matha, organised by Paryaya Sri Puthige Matha, will take place from 9 to 1 January. Australian MP John Mulholland from Victoria is set to participate in the event following an invitation from Paryaya Peethadhipathi Sri Sugunendra Tirtha Swamiji, Matha authorities said on Wednesday. The festival traces its origins back over 800 years when Sri Madhvacharya installed the idol of Lord Krishna in Udupi on the auspicious day of Makar Sankranti. Mulholland, who played a key role in securing government support for the Sri Puthige Matha branch in Melbourne, was invited by the Matha's International Secretary Prasannacharya, they said. Renowned scholar and devotee of Lord Krishna, Sri Pundarika Goswami of the Gaudiya Madhva Matha, known for his Bhagavata discourses attended by eminent dignitaries, will also be present at the event, they added. —*PTI*

Surrender turns forest Naxals into urban Naxals: BJP

'Civilised society must question Cong govt's move to help Naxals'

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

BJP General Secretary Sunil Kumar on Wednesday termed the State government facilitating the surrender of a group of six Maoists as a "package" to convert forest Naxals into urban Naxals.

Six Maoists surrendered before Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday evening, expressing their intention to return to the mainstream, giving up the armed struggle, official sources said.

Those who were expected to surrender are Mundagaru Latha, Sundari Kuthlur, Vanajakshi Balehole, and Mareppa Aroli of Karnataka, K Vasanth of Tamil Nadu and Jeesha of Kerala.

"Government's move of providing a package for Naxals to surrender is a worrying development. These Naxals sounded the noise of bullets in the Malnad (western ghats) region that was peaceful, in the name of struggle. The civilised society has to question this move of Siddaramaiah government. The government that has withdrawn cases against PFI is now providing an opportunity for Naxals to surrender, this is dangerous," Kumar said.

Government's move of providing a package for Naxals to surrender is a worrying development. These Naxals sounded the noise of bullets in the Malnad region that was peaceful, in the name of struggle. The civilised society has to question this move of Siddaramaiah government. The government that has withdrawn cases against PFI is now providing an opportunity for Naxals to surrender, this is dangerous
-Sunil Kumar
BJP General Secretary Sunil Kumar *PHOTO: PTI*

Pointing out that Naxals are surrendering a week after CM Siddaramaiah appealed to them, he asked, "Is Siddaramaiah close to Naxals, or those close to Naxals are close to Siddaramaiah?"

"This is a package to convert forest Naxals into urban Naxals. This cannot be called a surrender package. Naxals were feeling abandoned, with people or society living in and around the forests not supporting their thinking, and they had no other choice. Siddaramaiah government has now given them a ray of hope," he added.

According to officials, the surrender is arranged following the efforts of the state government's committee to oversee the implementation of the rehabilitation policy to assimilate/surrender left-wing extremists.

He had recently appealed to the Naxalites (Maoists) involved in violent activities to surrender and join the democratic mainstream. He had then said that the government had already formulated a surrender policy for Naxals. —*PTI*

'FOR COMMUNITY SUPPORT'

No politics behind postponed Cong SC/ST meeting: HM

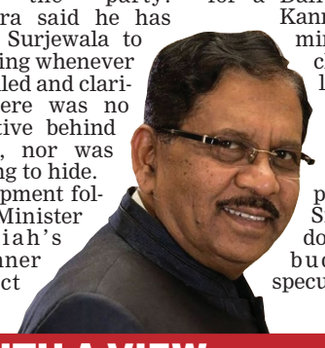
BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said a dinner meeting of Congress leaders, ministers, and lawmakers from SC/ST communities, scheduled for the evening, had to be postponed following instructions from AICC General Secretary in-charge of the state, Randeep Singh Surjewala, as he wanted to attend it.

The meeting was intended as a preparatory discussion for an SC/ST convention aimed at consolidating community support for the party. Parameshwara said he has now invited Surjewala to join the meeting whenever it is rescheduled and clarified that there was no political motive behind the meeting, nor was there anything to hide.

This development follows Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's recent dinner with select Dalit and ST Cabinet colleagues, which created a buzz within the ruling Congress amid speculation about a possible change of guard in the state after March, under a "rotational chief minister" or "power-sharing" formula.

"Since the AICC General Secretary requested a temporary postponement, we have obliged. The meeting is not cancelled but will be rescheduled," he clarifiedA section within the Congress feels that the SC/ST convention and Parameshwara's dinner meeting could revive the demand for a Dalit or AHINDA (a Kannada acronym for minorities, backward classes, and Dalits) leader to become the next chief minister. This could complicate Shivakumar's prospects if Siddaramaiah steps down after the state budget, as speculated. —*PTI*



Belagavi BJP MLA booked for 'Jai Maharashtra' slogan

BELAGAVI, 8 JAN

A police complaint has been lodged against Belagavi South BJP MLA Abhay Patil following a controversial incident during the unveiling ceremony of a statue of Sambhaji Maharaj on Sunday. The complaint, filed by the Kitturu Karnataka Sene, a pro-Kannada organisation, alleges that Patil invited Maharashtra Public Works Department Minister Shivendraraje Bhosale, who ended his speech with the slogan "Jai Maharashtra."

The organisation claims that Belagavi, being a border-sensitive area with tensions over the Kannada-Marathi language dispute, is highly sensitive to such slogans. They accuse Patil, along with Belagavi Mayor Savita Kamble and Deputy Mayor Anand Chavan, of clapping in response to Bhosale's speech, which they argue caused distress among Kannadigas.

- As the case has been filed, the police are consulting legal experts, as the matter concerns elected representatives and may be handled by the Elected Representatives' Court

It states that the unveiling of the statue, funded by the Belagavi mayor, was done without proper permission, and that the statue should be removed or replaced with one honouring freedom fighters from State, rather than figures associated with Maharashtra.

As the case has been filed, the police are consulting legal experts, as the matter concerns elected representatives and may be handled by the Elected Representatives' Court.

Belagavi Deputy Commissioner Mohammed Roshan said that the statue was unveiled without following official protocol and stated that it would need to be reopened in compliance with the proper procedures.

——*Salar News*

DINNER WITH A VIEW

Tiger Aero Restaurant, a unique dining experience inside an aeroplane, will soon open near Bannerghatta in Bengaluru *PHOTO: SALAR*

CM Siddaramaiah, DK Shivakumar, Parameshwara during Cubbon Park Police Station inauguration on Wednesday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Development thrives with people-friendly cops: CM

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah urged the state police force on Wednesday to establish a people-friendly system and treat individuals who visit police stations with respect.

After inaugurating the newly built Chamarajpet, Cubbon Park, and High Grounds police stations, he also inaugurated the Pulakeshi Nagar police quarters near Lazar Road.

According to him, when there is peace and order in the State, the pace of development increases. He urged police officials to create an atmosphere of fear for criminals and a fear-free environment for the public. He also noted that real estate scams in the city are on the rise.

"It will not be tolerated if the police join hands with the real estate mafia," he added.

Noting that constables, sub-inspectors, and inspectors often work extended hours to keep the city safe, the he said the government will take responsibility for their welfare.

"The government is always ready to provide necessary privileges and new stations to the department," he added. —*PTI*

LOKAYUKTA RAIDS PROPERTIES LINKED TO 8 GOVT OFFICERS

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

The Lokayukta sleuths on Wednesday raid places connected to eight government officers, including a Joint Commissioner of Transport Department, who are accused of amassing assets disproportionate to their known sources of income.

The places being raided are connected to the officers including the Joint Commissioner of Transport, Bengaluru, Shobha; Kadur Health and Family Welfare Officer Dr SN Umesh and Basavakalyan based Inspector in the minor irrigation department, Ravindra.

Others facing raids include, Khanapur Tehsildar Prakash Sridhar Gaekwad; retired Road Transport Officer in Tumakuru, S Raju; Assistant Executive Engineer in Gadag Municipality, Huchesh alias Huchappa; Ballari based Welfare Officer R H Lokesh and Junior Engineer in Raichur based BESCOM office Huliraja.

He started raids at multiple locations including houses and offices of these officers in Bengaluru and elsewhere. —*PTI*

Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan convention on 21 Jan in Belagavi

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Wednesday said that a mega 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' convention will be held under the aegis of the AICC to commemorate the centenary celebrations of the 1924 Indian National Congress session, which was presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.

The event will be held in Belagavi on 21 January. He said that at least 100 party leaders and workers from each assembly segment across the state should participate.

The celebrations were postponed following the death of former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh last month.

Additionally, as part of the State government event, a statue of Mahatma Gandhi will be unveiled on the premises of Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi.

"AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge, our leader Rahul Gandhi, General Secretaries K C Venugopal and Randeep Singh Surjewala, and other office bearers, after discussion, have directed us to organise the remaining programmes of the Gandhi Bharat event on 21 January, from where it was stopped (following Singh's death)," Shivakumar said.

As a preparatory measure, a general body meeting of the KPCC is being organised on 13 January, followed by a meeting of the office bearers of the state Congress later that day.

He claimed that ED raids in the 'Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike' was an outcome of infighting in the BJP.

ED on Tuesday searched the offices of Engineer-in-Chief BS Prahlad and other engineers in the BBMP in connection with the borewells and Reverse Osmosis plants in the areas where Cauvery water connection has not been provided, sources in civic agency said.

He said he had instructed the BBMP officials about one and a half years ago to be prepared for the possible raids and provide whatever documents the ED officials would ask for."We will cooperate with them. There is nothing wrong in it. I don't know the details but officers yesterday told me about it," he said. He said when documents are provided under the Right to Information to everyone, the ED officials will also be given the same —*PTI*

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

FRESH REGULATIONS SOUGHT

HC scraps Central, State green energy rules

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

High Court has invalidated the Electricity (Promoting Renewable Energy Through Green Energy Open Access) Rules, 2022, formulated by the Central Government for the generation, purchase, and consumption of renewable energy.

The Court ruled that the Centre lacked the authority under the Electricity Act, 2003, to frame such rules, as the Act specifically grants this power to the Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC).

Justice NS Sanjay Gowda noted that the Act was designed to ensure that regulatory powers, including tariff determination and open access provisions, are handled by independent bodies like the KERC, free from governmental interference.

The judgment came in response to petitions filed by hydroelectric companies *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

"The Parliament, through the Electricity Act, entrusted the Regulatory Commissions with the exclusive power to oversee open access. The Central Government cannot bypass this legislative mandate by framing its own rules," the Court stated.

The Court also struck down the Karnataka Regulatory Commission (Terms and Conditions for Green Energy Open Access) Regulations, 2022, which were framed by KERC in compliance with the now-invalidated Central Rules. It directed KERC to draft fresh regulations, if necessary, for granting open access to renewable energy generators and consumers.

The judgment came in response to petitions filed by hydroelectric companies that argued the Central Rules infringed on KERC's exclusive powers under Sections 42(2) and 181 of the Electricity Act. —*PTI*

Guv writes to CM over 'police atrocity' on BJP MLC

MYSURU, 8 JAN

Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot has written to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah advising him to personally look into BJP MLC CT Ravi's complaint alleging "police atrocity" in Belagavi, after the legislature session last month, and take necessary action.

Gehlot in his letter to Chief Minister dated 31 December, refers to Ravi along with his colleagues meeting him and submitting a detailed representation regarding the incident that happened after the end of the session in Belagavi.

Ravi had allegedly used a derogatory word against Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on 19 December during an altercation between them, when the House was adjourned for a while.

He was arrested on the same day evening and taken into the police van from the premises of Suvarna Vidhana Soudha in Belagavi, where the legislature session was held, based on Hebbalkar's complaint. The Court subsequently ordered the immediate release of Ravi in its interim order. In his letter he said, "Ravi has informed that the Commissioner of Police, Belagavi and Superintendent of Police, Belagavi and officers kidnapped him and carried him to locations like sugar cane field, Khanapur, Kittur, Lokapur and also injured him to bleed in custody." —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

'Asked Priyanka to watch Emergency, she said OK, maybe'

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra complimented Kangana Ranaut on her work and her hair when they crossed paths in Parliament and responded with an "okay, maybe" when the actor and BJP MP asked the Congress leader to watch her new film "Emergency". The much in the news film sees Ranaut playing the late Indira Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi's grandmother. Directed and produced by Ranaut, it documents the 21 months of Emergency imposed in 1975 by then prime minister Indira Gandhi. "I met Mrs Priyanka Gandhi in Parliament and she complimented me on my work and my hair. So I was like, 'You know, I made this film Emergency and maybe you should see it'. And she was like, 'Okay, maybe'. And I think if they have a little bit of acceptance for what has been, they will appreciate the film," Ranaut said. *—PTI*

Foreign Secy Misri meets Afghan foreign minister

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

India on Wednesday said it would consider engaging in development projects in Afghanistan and provide material support to the country in the health sector as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held talks with the Taliban regime's acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai. It was the first publicly acknowledged engagement between the foreign secretary and a senior minister of the Taliban set up and it saw the Afghan side underlining its "sensitivities" to India's security concerns. In response to the request from the Afghan side, India will provide further material support in the first instance to the health sector and for the rehabilitation of refugees, it said. It was also agreed to promote the use of the Chabahar Port for supporting trade and commercial activities. *—PTI*

HC allows lawyer to watch KTR's questioning

Hyderabad, 8 JAN

Telangana High Court on Wednesday allowed a lawyer to accompany BRS leader K T Rama Rao to the ACB's office where he will be questioned in a case related to alleged unauthorised payments to conduct a Formula E race, on 9 January. The court, however, made it clear that the advocate would not be present in the same room where the ACB sleuths would be examining Rama Rao. The advocate can sit in a room where he (the advocate) can see his client and investigating officer and observe the proceedings, the court said. Meanwhile, senior IAS officer Arvind Kumar, one of the accused in the FIR registered in Formula E race issue, appeared before the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) here on Wednesday. *—PTI*

Ethnic clashes not govt's fault: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, 8 JAN

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday termed the ongoing ethnic violence in the state as "very unfortunate" and said his government is not at fault since it all started after the Meiteis demanded Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. Addressing a gathering of internally displaced persons, Singh said no politics should be played when the state is witnessing a human crisis. Recalling the violence that started on 3 May, 2023, the CM said, "Meanwhile, security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition during search operations in Thoubal district. A group of Manipur Congress leaders on Wednesday met new Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla at Raj Bhavan. *—PTI*

'Sheesh Mahal' sparks AAP-BJP showdown

AAP leaders attempt to take a media tour of Kejri's home; BJP claims 'tamper of evidence'

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

AAP leaders' attempt to take a media tour to former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence here in a bid to counter "Sheesh Mahal" jibes has earned the BJP wrath which said trying to "forcibly" enter the premises was an example of "irresponsible, insane and anarchic behaviour".

AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj demolished "political etiquette and ethics" through their "shameless" act, BJP national spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi said on Wednesday.

No matter how hard they try they cannot get away from the "disgusting display of corruption" in building Kejriwal's "Sheesh Mahal", Trivedi said, slamming Singh and Bharadwaj.

"What AAP leaders did today was a glaring example of their irresponsible, insane and anarchic behaviour'. They tried to enter the (former CM's residence) forcibly," Trivedi told a press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

This shows the writing on the wall is clear to them that the AAP is losing the Delhi assembly polls, he said.

"No matter how much they try, they cannot get away with the 'Sheesh Mahal', which has become a monument of Kejriwal's extravagance. They cannot get away with the truth that a museum of a variety of luxury items was set up in the 'Sheesh Mahal' with the money looted from the people of Delhi," he said.

He said the AAP's allegations about money spent on the PM's residence are "petty and childish". He flayed the party for comparing the PM's residence with the 6, Flagstaff Road House "which is not even designated as the official residence of the Delhi chief minister".

He said the renovation at the 6, Flagstaff Road House is under "investigation", and asked AAP leaders why they tried to enter the building a day after the Model Code of Conduct came into effect.

Addressing a separate press conference at the BJP headquarters, party national spokesperson Gaurav Bhatia alleged AAP leaders tried to enter the former Delhi chief minister's residence to "tamper with the evidence" of corruption. *—PTI*

AAP leaders Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bharadwaj outside Delhi Chief Minister Atishi's official residence, New Delhi, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

- Gaurav Bhatia alleged AAP leaders tried to enter the former home to 'tamper with the evidence' of corruption

Kejriwal says some BJP's 'Pandit Prakoshth' joining AAP

AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal on Monday claimed that some members of the BJP's 'Pandit Prakoshth' (Priest Cell) joined his party's 'Sanatana Sewa Samiti' ahead of Delhi assembly elections. In a press conference, Kejriwal said those who quit BJP's Pandit Prakoshth to join AAP include Vijay, Jitendra Sharma, Brijesh, Manish, Dushyant and Udaykant Jha.

Atishi writes to CEC again

Delhi Chief Minister Atishi has written to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, seeking an appointment to discuss alleged electoral roll manipulation in the New Delhi constituency from where AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal is contesting the assembly polls. This is her second letter to the CEC. *—PTI*

Cong promises Rs 25 lakh health cover

Congress on Wednesday promised a "Jeevan Raksha Yojana" for free health insurance of up to Rs 25 lakh if voted to power in Delhi. Senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot said the proposed scheme would be a game-changer. *—PTI*

Bidhuri didn't speak about his cheek, says Priyanka

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday dubbed former BJP MP Ramesh Bidhuri's controversial reference to her cheeks as "ridiculous", and said important issues should be discussed during the Delhi assembly polls instead of such irrelevant matters. He did not speak about his own cheeks, the Wayanad MP told reporters in a jibe at Bidhuri.

Meanwhile, Bidhuri's recent controversial remarks about Delhi chief minister Atishi and Priyanka have sparked a backlash, leading to discussions within the party about replacing him with a woman candidate for the upcoming assembly election. *— PTI/ Agencies*

Republican criticises Biden's Adani probe

WASHINGTON, 8 JAN

Challenging the decision of the Biden administration to investigate the activities of Indian billionaire Gautam Adani, an influential Republican lawmaker has said such selective actions risk damaging critical alliances with key partners.

In a strongly worded letter to US Attorney General Merrick B Garland, Congressman Lance Gooden, a member of the House Judiciary Committee, also asked "What will the US do if India refuses to comply with an extradition request."

"The Department of Justice's selective actions risk damaging critical alliances with key partners like India, one of America's strongest allies in the Asia-Pacific region," Gooden said in his 7 January letter.

"Instead of pursuing cases with tenuous jurisdiction and limited relevance to the US interests, the DOJ should focus on punishing bad actors at home, rather than chasing rumours abroad," he said.

The Republican lawmaker said targeting entities that invest tens of billions of dollars and create tens of thousands of jobs for Americans only harms the US in long run.

"When we forego real threats from violent crime, economic espionage and CCP influence and go after those who contribute to our economic growth, it discourages valuable new investors who are hopeful of investing in our country," he said. *—PTI*

ANNA UNIVERSITY CASE

Stalin vows to get justice for rape survivor

CHENNAI, 8 JAN

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Wednesday asserted in the Assembly that the government's only objective in the student sexual assault case is to get justice for the victim, according to law.

The main Opposition AIADMK staged a walkout when the Chief Minister hit out at them by referring to the sexual assault case during their regime (2016-21).

Stalin, referring to the issue being raised by parties including the main opposition AIADMK, said the sexual assault perpetrated on a Chennai student was a huge cruelty and unacceptable.

The CM asserted that expeditious investigation will be held and chargesheet will be filed within 60 days. Also, the government will make all efforts to bring the matter to a Special court for trial and get the maximum punishment for the accused. "The DMK's Dravidian model of governance is a regime for the women."

While several MLAs had spoken with true concern, a member spoke to create a wrong opinion against the incumbent regime, he said.

The government may be blamed, in case, if the accused had not been arrested immediately and if it had been decided to protect the accused.

"We do not deny that. He might have taken photographs with ministers and politicians. whoever it may be, even if they are DMK, we will for sure take action." *—PTI*

PM unveils ₹2L cr projects in Andhra

VISAKHAPATNAM, 8 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday virtually laid the foundation stone and launched projects worth over Rs 2 lakh crore here.

Among others he laid the foundation stone for a railway zone here and NTPC's integrated green hydrogen hub at Pudimadaka in Anakapalli district.

He also dedicated to the nation various projects in the rail and road sectors.

The green hydrogen hub is a joint green energy ecosystem initiative between NTPC Green Energy Ltd and the New & Renewable Energy Development Corporation of Andhra Pradesh (NREDCAP).

The Prime Minister virtually laid the foundation stone for Krishnapatnam industrial hub, a Rs 1,518 crore project coming up on a 2,500-acre land parcel in the first phase. It is expected to generate employment opportunities for 50,000 people.

This was Modi's first visit to the state after he assumed the office of the Prime Minister for the third consecutive term in 2024. NDA alliance played a key role in forming union government. *—PTI*

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan during a roadshow, in Visakhapatnam, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Ajit-led NCP trying to poach MPs of rival faction: Raut

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday claimed that the Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) was trying to engineer defections in the rival NCP (SP), promising its leaders berths in the Union cabinet.

Raut's comment came after NCP leader Amol Mitkari said that some Lok Sabha members from the Sharad Pawar-led NCP were in contact with Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar.

NCP (SP) MLA and former state minister Jitendra Awhad also alleged that Sunil Tatkare, state chief of the Ajit Pawar-led NCP, had asked MPs of the rival faction to "leave the father and daughter", an apparent reference to Sharad Pawar and his daughter, Baramati MP Supriya Sule. *—PTI*

Rlys spent 76% of its budget within 9 months: Ministry

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

The Railways has spent 76 percent of its budgetary outlay within the first nine months of the current fiscal, the ministry said in a press statement.

"According to a latest expenditure report of Indian Railways till January 5, 2025, heavy investment is made in capacity augmentation, a reality aiming to make rail travel a world class experience," it added.

According to the Railway Ministry, the total capex for railways in Budget Estimate 2024-25 is Rs 2,65,200 crore with Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 2,52,200 crores. Out of it, Rs 1,92,446 crores have already been spent.

"In safety-related works, out of budgetary allocation of Rs 34,412 crore, the amount spent is Rs 28,281, which is 82 percent of the allocated amount.

The press note stated that the government has prioritised transforming Railways into a world class entity, which ferries on an average "2.3 crore Indians" daily at an affordable cost. *—PTI*

'SETS GLOOMY BACKDROP'

New GDP growth figure shadow over Budget: Cong

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

The downward revision of GDP growth estimates for the current fiscal calls for radical action to dispel the cloud of growth slowdown and investment chill in the country, the Congress said on Wednesday.

AICC general secretary in-charge (communications) Jairam Ramesh said it also set a gloomy backdrop to the Union Budget.

He suggested that income support for India's poor, higher MGNREGA wages and increased minimum support prices (MSPs) were the need of the hour, and demanded a drastic simplification of the "comically complex" GST regime and Income Tax relief for the middle class.

In a statement, Ramesh said the advance estimates released by the Union government for GDP growth in the 2024-25 financial year projected a mere 6.4 per cent growth.

Jairam Ramesh **PHOTO: X**

"This is a four-year low, and a sharp deceleration compared to the 8.2 per cent growth recorded in FY24 (2023-24). It is even lower than the recent RBI estimate of 6.6 per cent growth which itself marked a reduction from the earlier projection of 7.2 per cent. In a few short weeks, the bottom has fallen out of the Indian economy, with the all-important manufacturing sector simply refusing to expand as it should," he said.

The Congress leader said the government could no longer deny the reality of India's growth slowdown and its various dimensions.

He alleged India's consumption story had gone into reverse swing in the past 10 years.

Ramesh also pointed to sluggish private investment, saying the government's projection for growth in Gross Fixed Capital Formation (public and private) was that it would slow to 6.4 per cent this year, from 9 per cent last year. *—PTI*

India offers support to Maldives for defence preparedness

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

India on Wednesday conveyed to the Maldives its readiness to support the island nation in boosting its defence preparedness as Defence Minister Rajnath Singh hosted his Maldivian counterpart Mohammed Ghassan Maumoon for wide-ranging talks focusing on maritime security cooperation.

In their meeting, the two defence ministers reasserted their firm commitment to work closely in realising the joint vision for India-Maldives comprehensive economic and maritime security partnership, according to an Indian readout.

Maumoon is on a three-day visit to India, nearly eight months after New Delhi completed pulling out its military personnel from the Maldives following a demand by its pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu.

The overall episode had significantly frayed the ties between the two nations.

Maldives Defence Minister Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon meets Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in New Delhi, on Wednesday **PHOTO: ANI**

The defence ministry said the two ministers comprehensively reviewed various aspects of bilateral defence and security cooperation.

Singh "reaffirmed" India's readiness to support the Maldives in capability enhancement for defence preparedness, including provisioning of defence platforms and assets to augment its capacities, as per its national priorities and in line with New Delhi's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and the vision of SAGAR, the ministry said. *—PTI*

In a 1st, Kerala to start compostable water bottles

T'PURAM, 8 JAN

A Kerala startup, under the aegis of the Kerala Irrigation Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd is set to launch eco-friendly organic water bottles soon. Also called 'compostable bottles,' this initiative is considered the first in the country. The new product, marketed under the brand 'Hilly Aqua,' aims to replace plastic bottles. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan is scheduled to launch the product in mid-January, according to a statement issued on Wednesday. Once operational, the initiative will position Kerala as the first state in the country to launch organic water bottles, it added. *—PTI*

Wrong spelling in note helps police crack kidnapping

HARDOI, 8 JAN

Wrong spelling in a ransom note helped police crack a staged kidnapping in which a man tried to con his elder brother with a Rs 50,000 demand, officials said on Wednesday.

On 5 January when Sanjay Kumar, a contractor in Hardoi, told police that he received a ransom note from an unknown number demanding Rs 50,000 for releasing his brother Sandeep, who was "kidnapped". The note said if he failed to pay the amount, it would result in "deth" of his brother. Kumar also received a 13-second video clip in which his brother could be seen tied with a rope. Police said the wrong spelling of death in the ransom note -- spelled as "deth" -- gave clue that the person behind the act was not much educated. Suspicion grew as Kumar did not have enmity with anyone, nor was the ransom amount that big. Tracking his mobile phone location, police traced Sandeep to Rupapur. Police asked him to jot down a ransom note of his kidnapping, in which he again spelt death as "deth", police said. *—PTI*

Govt home Chief suspended after teen gives birth

KORBA, 8 JAN

The superintendent of a government-run residential school has been suspended after a Class 11 student gave birth to a premature baby in Chhattisgarh's Korba, an official said on Wednesday. The condition of the baby girl, born in the seventh or eighth month of pregnancy, is critical. The incident took place at Kasturba Gandhi residential school at Podi on Tuesday. The hostel-cum-school is run by the tribal development department. Students in the hostel informed the superintendent that the girl had been vomiting since Monday. A newborn baby was then found on the premises when her cries were heard, according to the superintendent. The student, who was taken to hospital, admitted that she had given birth to the baby and threw it away through the window of the toilet late Monday night. *—PTI*

Man upset with niece's wedding, poison's party food

KOLHAPUR, 8 JAN

A man allegedly gatecrashed his niece's wedding reception in Maharashtra's Kolhapur and mixed poison in the food prepared for guests as he was against her marriage, police said on Wednesday. No person, however, consumed that food and its samples have been sent for testing, they said, adding that the accused was absconding. The incident took place in Utre village under Panhala tehsil on Tuesday afternoon following which some people caught hold of the accused, but he managed to run away, they said. The Panhala police have registered a case against the man, identified as Mahesh Patil, resident of Utre village and maternal uncle of the woman, on charges of endangering the lives of people, Panhala police station's sub-inspector Mahesh Kondubhairi said. *—PTI*

Court's opinion vs govt's power: SC on CEC law

SC will hear pleas against the law on 4 February

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

It will be court's opinion under Article 141 versus the legislative power to enact law, Supreme Court on Wednesday said as it posted the pleas challenging the appointment of the chief election commissioner and election commissioners under the 2023 law on 4 February.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant, Dipankar Datta and Ujjal Bhuyan was informed by advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing an NGO, the incumbent Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar was set to superannuate on 18 February, and a new CEC would be appointed under the new law, if the court didn't intervene.

Bhushan said the court in its 2 March, 2023 verdict set up a panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the CJI to appoint the CEC and election commissioners (EC).

In 2024, the court refused to stay the appointments of new ECs *PHOTO: ANI*

"However, under the new law the selection committee will comprise the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet minister, Leader of Opposition. They have removed CJI," submitted Bhushan.

While posting the hearing on 4 February, the bench said it would see whose views had supremacy.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for the petitioners, said the government did not remove the basis of the 2 March, 2023 judgement, and enacted a new law.

Bhushan said the government couldn't control the appointment of election commissioners as it would be a threat to democracy.

"We are of the view that the government cannot remove the CJI from the selection panel which was directed to be formed by the Supreme Court on 2 March, 2023," he said.

Sankaranarayanan said the only way the Centre could have got around the judgement was by amending the Constitution and not enacting a law.

On 15 March, 2024, the top court refused to stay the appointments of new ECs under a 2023 law and deferred the hearing on a batch of pleas challenging the appointments.

The top court told the petitioners the 2 March, 2023 verdict directed for the three-member panel comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition and the CJI to operate till Parliament enacted a law. *—PTI*

121 LIVES LOST

On 2 July, 2024, a stampede occurred during the satsang organised by the followers of Surajpal alias Bhole Baba, who is absconding *PHOTO: PTI*

'You are liable': HC to govt officials on Hathras stampede

PRAYAGRAJ, 8 JAN

- The court expressed the need for the district and police administration to take lessons from the Hathras incident and make proper arrangements for the upcoming Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to avoid such mishaps.

Allahabad High Court directed the then district magistrate and senior superintendent of police of Hathras to personally appear on 15 January and explain why they should not be held liable for the stampede in 2024 that claimed 121 lives.

Justice Shekhar Kumar Yadav on January 6 said such incidents were the result of poor arrangements made by the organisers.

"The organisers call innocent people for their benefit and due to lack of proper arrangements, such incidents happen. It is the responsibility of the administration to see whether there is proper arrangement of police force, medical, etc., or not," the judge said while hearing the bail plea of one Manju Devi.

The court further said, "In the past, many such incidents have been seen where lakhs of people gather in such events, poor and illiterate people gather due to faith and belief, and due to losing their temper, people die untimely in the stampede."

Government counsel Rupak Chaubey said the organisers sought permission estimating a crowd of 80,000 people, but a crowd of 2.5 lakh turned up at the venue.

On 2 July, 2024, a stampede occurred during the "satsang" organised by the followers of Surajpal alias Bhole Baba in Fulrai Mughalgarhi of Hathras leaving 121 dead.

While FIR was registered on the complaint of sub-inspector Brijesh Pandey, the petitioner's name cropped up during the investigation.

The court expressed the need for the district and police administration to take lessons from the Hathras incident and make proper arrangements for the upcoming Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj to avoid such mishaps. *—PTI*

Comments on woman's body sexual harassment: Kerala HC

KOCHI, 8 JAN

Kerala High Court has held that a comment on a woman's "body structure" is a sexually coloured remark which would constitute penal offence of sexual harassment.

The ruling by Justice A Badharudeen came while dismissing a former Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) employee's plea to quash the sexual harassment case against him filed by a woman staffer.

The woman alleged that the accused used vulgar language against her from 2013 and then in 2016-17 began sending objectionable messages and voice calls.

Despite complaints against him to the KSEB and police, he continued sending her objectionable messages, she had claimed. Following her complaints, the accused was booked. Seeking to quash the case, the accused claimed that mere reference that a person has a nice body structure could not be attributed to sexually coloured remarks within the ambit of section 354A and 509 of the IPC and section 120(o) of the Kerala Police Act. The prosecution and the woman, on the other hand, contended that the calls and messages of the accused carried sexually coloured remarks intended to harass her and outrage her modesty. Agreeing with the prosecution's contentions, the Kerala High Court court said that prima facie, the ingredients to attract the offences under sections 354A and 509 of IPC and section 120 (o) of the Kerala Police Act "are made out". *—PTI*

- Seeking to quash the case, the accused claimed that mere reference that a person has a nice body structure could not be attributed to sexually coloured remarks.

Periya murders: HC suspends terms of 4 convicts

KOCHI, 8 JAN

Kerala High Court on Wednesday suspended the sentence of four accused, including a former CPI(M) MLA, who were sentenced to five years imprisonment in the murder of two Youth Congress workers in Periya, a town in Kasaragod five years ago.

The bench put on hold the five-year sentence of former MLA and CPI(M) district leader KV Kunhiraman, Kanhangad block panchayat president K Manikandan, Raghavan Velutholi, and AV Bhaskaran on their appeal against their conviction and subsequent punishment. A CBI court had last week sentenced 10 people to life in the case and gave five years imprisonment to Kunhiraman, Manikandan, Velutholi and Bhaskaran. *—PTI*

Court plea claims temple under Aligarh mosque

ALIGARH, 8 JAN

An RTI activist filed a petition in a Civil Court in Aligarh, alleging that the Jama Masjid in the city had been constructed where Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu temples once stood.

The claim is based on responses to queries filed under provisions of the Right To Information (RTI) Act with various government departments, including the Aligarh Municipal Corporation.

Civil Judge Gajendra Singh ordered on Monday that the case would be taken up for hearing on 15 February, Pandit Keshav Dev Gautam, the activist behind the petition, claimed while speaking to reporters.

PHOTO: X

The mosque is located in the Upper Kot area, a densely populated, Muslim-majority locality in the old city. *—PTI*

Court to hear Sambhal mosque case on 5 March

SAMBHAL, 8 JAN

A court has fixed 5 March as the next date of hearing in a case connected to the Mughalera Shahi Jama Masjid and its survey at Chandausi.

"The Supreme Court has directed all the lower courts not to entertain new suits seeking surveys of any place of worship until further orders. We have filed a copy of the said order in the court, which fixed 5 March as the next date of hearing," Shakil Ahmad Wari, advocate representing the Muslims, said. *—PTI*

M'rashtra villagers go bald; water being tested

BULDHANA, 8 JAN

People from several villages in Maharashtra's Buldhana complained of sudden hair loss leading to baldness within a few days, prompting the authorities to initiate testing of local water sources for possible contamination.

A health department team started a survey in the villages on Tuesday after the matter came to light. It has begun medical treatment of the affected people, Shegaon health officer Dr Deepali Bahekar told reporters here.

As many as 30 people from Kalvad, Bondgaon and Hingna in Shegaon were found suffering from the hair loss problem and baldness during the survey conducted by the zilla parishad's health department. The department has started medical treatment of the patients as per the symptoms. *—PTI*

RACE AGAINST TIME

Body of trapped worker recovered from Assam mine

GUWAHATI, 8 JAN

The body of one of the nine workers trapped inside a coal mine in Assam's Dima Hasao was recovered by Army divers on Wednesday on the third day of the rescue operations, officials said.

The chances of the survival of the eight others appear grim, though a team of navy, army, NDRF and SDRF personnel intensified their efforts to rescue the trapped miners, they said.

The labourers were on Monday trapped inside the Assam Coal Quarry situated in the 3 Kilo area of Umrangso, after a sudden gush of water flooded the site.

The divers located the body of the worker inside the mine early in the morning and its identity was yet to be ascertained, they said.

A diver claimed that the body was spotted about 85 feet below the surface, and that the visibility was poor inside with water all around.

Rescue operation underway for labourers trapped inside a coal mine at Umrangso area, in Dima Hasao, Assam on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

SDRF dewatering pumps have departed from Umrangshu for the location. Additionally, the ONGC dewatering pump has been loaded onto an MI-17 helicopter at Kumbhigram.

Eyewitness accounts and initial assessments suggest the flooding occurred all of a sudden, probably due to the opening up of an underground water channel.

According to employees of the quarry, there were around 15 workers inside the mine, though the authorities did not confirm the number. *—PTI*

PMO DECIDES APPOINTMENT

ISRO has big missions ahead: New Chief

T'PURAM, 8 JAN

Eminent rocket scientist and the newly appointed chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) **V Narayanan** on Wednesday said that the space agency is going through a successful phase and Chandrayaan-4 and Gaganyaan are among the prominent missions ahead.

Narayanan was on Tuesday appointed Secretary, Department of Space, succeeding S Somanath, who will complete his tenure next week.

Narayanan said he considers it as a great luck to be part of such a great organisation led by great leaders.

Narayanan said the information about his new appointment was first passed on to him by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

PHOTO: X

When asked about the upcoming projects of ISRO, the newly appointed Chairman said it is the time when the space agency is undertaking significant missions.

Narayanan said ISRO launched the Space Docking Experiment (SpaDeX) mission on 30 December and the docking experiment of the SpaDeX satellites would be held on 9 January.

- Narayanan said the information about his new appointment was first passed on to him by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

Stating that Gaganyaan is another major programme before the ISRO, he said the works related to the launching of the uncrewed module or uncrewed rocket as part it are successfully progressing.

The works to send a commercial satellite of the United States using ISRO's Mark III vehicle and the rocket assembly as part of Gaganyaan (G 1) are also progressing there (Sriharikota), he further said.

While talking about the Bengaluru-headquartered agency's future projects, Narayanan said as everybody knows, India has become the first country to land in the south pole of the moon through the Chandrayaan 3 mission.

"In Chandrayaan 4, the objective is to land there and come back collecting samples. Works in this regard have already started," he explained. He also mentioned about the setting up of India's own space station.

"The Prime Minister has given approval for building a space station for us...The space station will have five modules and an approval has been granted to launch the first among them during (the year) 2028," the new Chairman added. *—PTI*

Chemmanur in custody for harassing Honey

KOCHI, 8 JAN

Businessman Bobby Chemmanur was taken into custody by a Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Wednesday, following a sexual harassment complaint filed by Malayalam actress Honey Rose.

The arrest took place in Wayanad, confirmed a Kochi City Police officer. The SIT, led by the Circle Inspector of Kochi Central Station, is probing the allegations made by Rose, who accused Chemmanur of making "repeated sexually colored" remarks against her. He has been booked under non-bailable sections of the law. W In her complaint, Rose mentioned Chemmanur's inappropriate behavior through various media platforms, which she claims outraged her modesty. Initially, she did not disclose his identity, but later named Chemmanur in a social media post, revealing his actions and stating that she had filed a complaint against him at the Kochi Central Police Station. Chemmanur, however, denied the allegations, stating there were no such issues between them and that he had always interacted with her in a friendly manner. He claimed his lawyers advised him that his actions were not objectionable. *—PTI*

WHEN TECH MEETS MEDICINE

In a first, Pune's Noble hospital has installed Made in India robots that will now perform surgeries. The SSI Mantra surgical robot features an advanced system with five arms and 3D 4K visuals, will assist in complex surgeries in fields such as cardio-thoracic, urology, and gynaecology. The hospital recently performed its first robotic surgery for colon carcinoma

PHOTO: SS INNOVATIONS

With record temp, has Earth's warming intensified?

Global temperatures in 2023 hit 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels, breaking records ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Earth's temperature has surged in the past two years, and climate scientists will soon announce that it hit a milestone in 2024: rising to more than 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels. But is this sudden spike just a blip in the climate data, or an early indicator that the planet is heating up at a faster pace than researchers thought?

That question has been at the centre of numerous studies, as well as a session at last month's meeting of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) in Washington DC. Some scientists argue that the spike can be mostly explained by two factors. One is the El Niño event that began in mid-2023 — a natural weather pattern in which warm water pools in the eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, often leading to hotter temperatures and more-turbulent weather. The other is a reduction over the past few years in air pollution, which can cool the planet by reflecting sunlight back into space and seeding low-lying clouds. Yet neither explanation fully accounts for the temperature surge, other researchers say.

Clouds clearly played a part, according to a study published in Science in December, just before the AGU meeting1. A research team identified a reduction in low-lying cloud cover across parts of the Northern Hemisphere and the tropics that, combined with El Niño, was large enough to explain the temperature spike in 2023.

But the cause of this decrease and whether it can be chalked up to normal climate variations — remains a mystery, the authors say. Decreased air pollution alone doesn't seem to explain it. They suggest that global warming itself could be causing some reduction in cloud coverage, creating a feedback loop that could accelerate the rate of climate change for decades to come.

"I would be very careful about saying this is clear evidence [of acceleration], but there might be something going on," says co-author Helge Goessling, a climate physicist at the Alfred Wegener Institute in Bremerhaven, Germany.

Why are scientists worried about global temperature?

One reason is that global temperatures were off-the-charts hot in 2023, with an average 1.45 °C of warming above the pre-industrial baseline (see 'Temperature surge'), shattering previous records. This level of warming is outside the range of what scientists expected on the basis of previous trends and modelling.

Temperature surge: Chart showing Average temperature above pre-industrial baseline since 1940. The past two years have set heat records for Earth and surpassed scientists' projections. Researchers are now debating whether the temperature spike is due to natural climate variation, or whether it indicates that the rate of glaobal warming is accelerating.

Another reason is that last year was also much warmer than expected. Scientists projected that early 2024 would be hot owing to El Niño. But they also anticipated that temperatures would fall after the weather pattern subsided and conditions in the equatorial Pacific returned to normal last June.

"That didn't happen," says Zeke Hausfather, a climate scientist at Berkeley Earth, a non-profit organization in California that tracks global temperatures. Instead, global temperatures remained elevated, shattering more records and probably making last year the warmest on record by a sizeable margin. "All of us who made projections at the start of the year underestimated just how warm 2024 would be."

Is there evidence of acceleration?

Some say that the massive temperature spike might end up being a blip in the climate data, owing in large part to new regulations covering air pollution from ocean-going ships.

In 2020, the United Nations International Maritime Organisation implemented a rule requiring an 80 per cent reduction in sulfur emissions from ships sailing in international waters. One analysis of satellite imagery, published in August, suggests that there has been a clear reduction in ship tracks2, which are formed when sulfur-containing pollution particles seed low-lying mists.

The changes seem to correlate with the broader reduction in cloud cover pinpointed by Goessling's team.

How to recover when a climate disaster destroys your city?

"It's almost a smoking gun," says Andrew Gettelman, a climate scientist at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland, Washington.

If true, Gettelman says, this would indicate that the recent temperature spike could be a one-time phenomenon driven by short-term changes in pollution and a powerful El Niño. *—Courtesy, Nature*

SALAR

Israel scribe returns to TV with AI-powered voice

When a renowned Israeli TV journalist lost his ability to speak clearly because of ALS, he thought his career might be over.

But now, using artificial-intelligence software that can recreate his widely recognised gravelly voice, Moshe Nussbaum — known to generations of viewers simply as "Nussi" — is making a comeback.

Nussbaum, 71, was diagnosed two years ago with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a progressive disease also known as Lou Gehrig's disease that attacks nerve cells that control muscles throughout the body.

At the time, he vowed to viewers of Israel's Channel 12 News to continue working as long as he was physically able. But, gradually, it became more and more difficult.

It was a devastating blow to the career of a leading, no-nonsense reporter who for more than 40 years had covered many of Israel's most important stories from the field. He had appeared from the scenes of suicide bombing attacks and the front lines of wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and had covered scandals in Israel's parliament and high-profile court cases.

After Hamas' 7 October, 2023, attack that triggered the war in Gaza, Nussbaum was unable to report from the field. It was the first war of his career he had ever sat out, he noted in a recent interview with colleagues at Channel 12, the country's largest station.

Even though he was having trouble moving and speaking, he launched a segment interviewing injured soldiers from Israeli hospitals. His questions were slow and halting, but he kept it up for the first half of the war. Then, as it became increasingly difficult to speak, and to be understood, his interviews became less frequent.

On Monday, Channel 12 made the surprising announcement that it would bring Nussbaum back to the air in the coming weeks as a commentator— with the help of AI.

"It took me a few moments to absorb it and to understand that it is me speaking now," Nussbaum told The Associated Press via text message. "Slowly, slowly, I'm understanding the incredible meaning of this device for everyone with disabilities, including me."

Nussbaum will report his stories, and then write them up, using an AI programme that has been trained to speak using Nussbaum's voice.

He will be filmed as if he were presenting, and his lips will be "technologically adjusted" to match the words.

People with speech disorders have used traditional text-to-speech technology for years, but those voices sound robotic and flat, and lack emotion.

In contrast, AI technology is trained using recordings of a person's voice — there are thousands of hours of Nussbaum speaking thanks to his lengthy career in TV and radio — and it can mimic their intonations and phrasing.

Thrilled by the possibilities the technology affords him, Nussbaum said he is also worried about the ease with which the technology could be used by bad actors to spread fake news and falsehoods.

In its current form, the technology will not work for live broadcasts, so Nussbaum won't be able to go out into the field, which is his favourite part of the job, he said. Instead, he will focus on commentary and analysis about crime and national security, his areas of expertise for decades.

Ahead of the broadcasts, Channel 12 released a preview showing snippets of Nussbaum speaking naturally — garbled and difficult to understand — followed by the new "Nussi AI."

The new version sounds strikingly like the old Nussbaum, speaking quickly and emphatically. Nussbaum was filmed as if he was presenting the report, sitting straight with his trademark bushy eyebrows moving up and down for emphasis.

"Honestly, this is my first time sitting here in the studio after more than a year," AI Nussbaum says in the preview.

"It feels a bit strange, and mostly, it tugs my heart."

AI-powered voice cloning has grown exponentially in recent years. Experts have warned that the technology can amplify phone scams, disrupt democratic elections and violate the dignity of people — living or dead — who never consented to having their voice recreated to say things they never said.

It's been used to produce deepfake robocalls mimicking President Joe Biden. Nussbaum had worried that ALS would rob him of the career he loved. In an interview with He calls his new AI-enabled persona a "magic trick" that enabled his comeback, and believes it will raise awareness in Israel of ways that people with disabilities — especially progressive disabilities — can continue to work.

"The fact that Channel 12 and my news managers are allowing me to reinvent myself anew, that is one of the most important medicines I can get in my fight with this disease," he said. *—PTI*

Israel's Channel 12 made an announcement that it would bring TV journalist Nussbaum back to the air in the coming weeks as a commentator— with the help of AI ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

51st US state: Trump threatens Canada with 'economic force'

US president-elect Donald Trump posted a distorted map showing Canada part of US; In retaliation Canada's ruling Liberal party posted a image distinguishing between which are the part of 'United States' and which are 'Not the United States' ***PHOTOS: X/@LIBERAL_PARTY, @TRUMPDAILYPOSTS***

Donald Trump is threatening to use "economic force" to make Canada the 51st American state. While his comments may be reckless, they are in part due to Canada's over-reliance on the United States market in terms of trade. President-elect Donald Trump speaks during a news conference at Mar-a-Lago on 7 January, 2025, in Palm Beach, Fla.

The benefits of international trade are undoubtedly positive. It's well-established that when countries can produce a product or service more cheaply than others, giving them what's known as a "comparative advantage," all other nations engaged will gain from that trade.

There are additional gains that come from economies of scale as companies get access to much larger markets than are available domestically. These include improvements in efficiency that arise through enhanced market competition, resulting in lower costs of production and reduced prices for consumers, and increases in the variety of goods and services available.

Canada has outgrown many of its protectionist roots and is now a trading nation. Despite having only 0.5 per cent of the world's population, Canada has 2.2 per cent of the total of world trade. Exports of goods support one out of every six Canadian jobs.

Understand how AI is changing society

While the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) and its predecessor, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), garner most of the headlines, Canada has a total of 15 free-trade agreements covering 61 per cent of world GDP, providing Canadian companies with access to 1.5 billion consumers worldwide.And Canada is seeking even more free-trade agreements, given their demonstrated benefits.

Made-in-Canada solution?

The key challenge Canadian policymaker's face is an over-reliance on the U.S. as Canada's primary market, with 75 per cent of all Canadian exports headed south.

One of the first lessons in business is not to put "all of your eggs in one basket." Canada clearly needs to diversify its trading partners, which is no easy feat. But there is a "made-in-Canada" solution to potential clouds on the international trade horizon. The US makes for a natural trading partner, given its large market and close proximity to Canada. The two countries share similar cultural norms and legal systems, and the same time zones and existing infrastructure, including ports, railways and bridges.

There's also new infrastructure planned, including the Gordie Howe International Bridge connecting Windsor and Detroit that will facilitate cross-border trade when it opens later this year.

A large freighter sails past a suspension bridge under construction over a wide river.

A freighter makes its way down the Detroit River past continuing construction on the Canadian span of the Gordie Howe International Bridge in December 2023 between Detroit and Windsor.

In July 2024, workers linked the two sides of the bridge.

But the over-reliance of Canadian exports to the US exposes Canada to significant risks that can result from unilateral American trade policies.

Canada's preferential access to the U.S. market can no longer be assured, as shown by the protectionism that came with Donald Trump's first term in office.

In his book The Retreat of Western Liberalism, Edward Luce, an editor with the Financial Times, argued there would be no "snap back," meaning a return to the status quo before the first Trump presidency.

When Joe Biden became U.S. president in 2020, American protectionism not only remained, but intensified with aggressive new tariffs.

With the return of Trump, who is promising even more tariffs on Canada, it seems Luce was right. There will be no snap back, and Canada can no longer take easy access to the US market for granted.

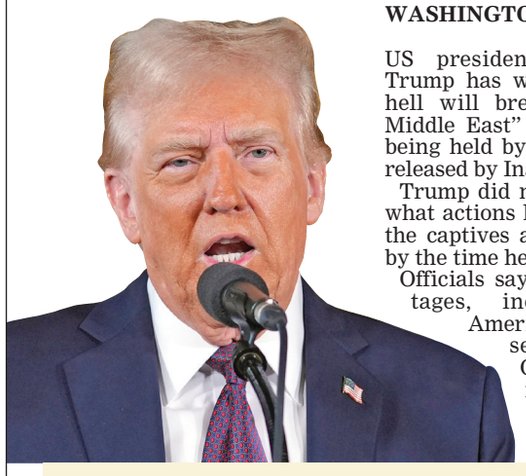
Provincial trade obstacles

One of the ironies in Canada's quest for more free-trade deals around the world are interprovincial trade barriers that exist within Canada. However, The Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) has said "it's easier to dobusiness in the US than in another part of Canada."

—Courtesy, The Conversation

Free Gaza hostages or face wrath: Trump

Negotiations between Hamas, Israel are going on in Qatar



WASHINGTON DC, 8 JAN

US president-elect Donald Trump has warned that "all hell will break out in the Middle East" if the hostages being held by Hamas are not released by Inauguration Day.

Trump did not elaborate on what actions he might take if the captives are not released by the time he takes office.

Officials say about 100 hostages, including some Americans, who were seized on 7 October, 2023, remain captive in Gaza, though they believe many of them may have died in captivity.

"All hell will break out. If those hostages aren't back, I don't want to hurt your negotiation, if they're not back by the time I get into office, all hell will break out in the Middle East," Trump told reporters at a news conference in Mar-a-Lago, Florida. Trump will be sworn in on 20 January as the 47th President of the United States. He was responding to a question on the status of negotiations with Hamas on the release of American hostages. His Special Envoy to the Middle East Steven Charles Witkoff, who has just returned from the region, told reporters that they are on the verge of it.

"I believe we've been on the verge of it. I don't want to discuss sort of what's delayed it, no point in being negative in any way. But I think it's the president, his stature, what he's said he expects, the red lines he's put out there, that's driving this negotiation," Witkoff said. Negotiations between Hamas and Israel are are going on in Qatar, with Hamas this week naming 34 hostages in Gaza — including two dual US citizens — it would be willing to release in a ceasefire deal, the National Public Radio reported. *—PTI*

SOROS' HATRED FOR HUMANITY INCLUDES ISRAEL, SAYS MUSK

WASHINGTON DC, 8 JAN

Tesla CEO Elon Musk on Wednesday criticised billionaire philanthropist George Soros again after the latter was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by US President Joe Biden. Musk on X said, "George Soros's hatred of humanity includes Israel btw", as he added a screenshot of an old news article of Soros funding of NGOs supporting Hamas.

Meanwhile, Musk backed Andrew Tate, in his bid to run for UK's prime minister after he called for King Charles III to dissolve parliament and hold a general election while expressing his concerns regarding child grooming gangs. In light of ongoing Trump-Canada row, Musk addressed outgoing Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, "Girl, you're not the governor of Canada anymore". *—Agencies*

Canal sovereignty is non-negotiable: Panama

PANAMA CITY, 8 JAN

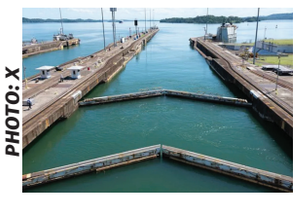


PHOTO: X

After US president-elect Donald Trump repeated inaccurate claims that China controls the Panama Canal, Panama has again reaffirmed its sovereignty over the key Atlantic-Pacific waterway.

Panama reiterated that the sovereignty of its eponymous ship canal was not up for discussion after

"The sovereignty of our canal is not negotiable and is part of our history of struggle," Foreign Minister Javier Martinez-Acha said, adding that President Jose Raul Mulino had made his stance clear.

But the president-elect went off-track, repeating unsubstantiated claims that the Panama Canal — which was built by the United States in the early 20th century and handed over to Panama in part in 1977 and in full in 1999 — was now being operated by China.

"Look, the Panama Canal is vital to our country," Trump said. "It's being operated by China — China! — and we gave the Panama Canal to Panama, we didn't give it to China. They've abused that gift."

Martinez-Acha dismissed the claim, saying: "The only hands operating the canal are Panamanian and that is how it is going to stay." *—DW News*

PHOTO: ANI

2 cops injured in Pakistan anti encroachment drive

KARACHI, 8 JAN

At least 12 policemen were injured when a drive to remove encroachments in Pakistan's Sindh province turned violent, leading to clashes between the authorities and a mob. The clashes took place on Tuesday in the Qasimabad area of Hyderabad city. Authorities faced stiff resistance from locals when they arrived with a strong police backup to remove encroachments and structures for restoring an irrigation channel and building a 24-foot-wide road on the land. Residents of the encroached structures pelted officials with stones, smashing panes of some government vehicles.

Around a dozen civilians from the protesting mob were also injured when law enforcement officials took to aerial firing and heavy teargas shelling to disperse the crowd. *—PTI*

Austrian FM to serve as country's interim leader

VIENNA, 8 JAN

Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg will serve as the country's interim leader while the Far-Right Freedom Party attempts to put together a new coalition government, the president's office said on Wednesday.

Schallenberg, 55, will take on the duties of outgoing Chancellor Karl Nehammer, who announced his resignation over the weekend after his efforts to put together a coalition without the Freedom Party collapsed.

Nehammer plans to step down on Friday. President Alexander Van der Bellen's office said in a statement that the head of state will formally task Schallenberg with "continuing the management of the chancellery and leading the interim government." It will be Schallenberg's second — and likely brief — stint as Austria's leader. *—PTI*

Taiwan probes China in undersea cable damage

TAIPEI, 8 JAN

Taiwan is investigating whether a cargo vessel linked to China was responsible for damaging an undersea cable that serves as a critical internet link for the island, the New York Times reported. The Taiwanese Coast Guard revealed that seven Chinese nationals were aboard the ship, which is suspected of causing damage to the Trans-Pacific Express Cable. This incident underscores Taiwan's vulnerability to potential disruptions in its critical infrastructure, especially as tensions with China continue to rise. The damaged cable, which also connects to South Korea, Japan, China, and the United States, is one of more than a dozen fibre-optic cables. *—PTI*

Thailand issues warrant in politician's murder

BANGKOK, 8 JAN

Thai police on Wednesday said an arrest warrant have been issued for a man suspected of gunning down a former opposition politician from Cambodia in a popular Bangkok tourist area. Lim Kimya, an ex-lawmaker from the dissolved Cambodia National Rescue Party, was shot dead near a temple close to Khaosan Road on Tuesday evening. He had reportedly just arrived at the scene with his wife by bus from Cambodia, said the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

Siam Boonsom, chief of Bangkok police, told reporters on Wednesday the initial investigation led them to believe the gunman was hired to carry out the shooting and that Lim Kimya was possibly identified to the gunman by another person, whom police are also pursuing. *—PTI*

Some Palestinians in the Gaza Strip still have hope the war will end soon *PHOTO: PTI*

Israeli strikes kill 17 people in Gaza

JERUSALEM, 8 JAN

Israeli airstrikes in southern Gaza killed at least 17 people on late Tuesday, nearly all of them women or children, the territory's Health Ministry said.

Five kids were killed as they sheltered together in the same tent, said Ahmed al-Farra, director of the child ward at nearby Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis. Their bodies were among eight children and five women brought to the hospital after strikes on tents, homes and a vehicle. Two bodies were unidentifiable.

The Israeli military said it targeted militants who had taken part in the 7 October, 2023, attack that sparked the war, without providing evidence. Israel said it took steps to lessen the risk of hurting civilians and blamed Hamas for the civilian casualties.

The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is raging with no end in sight, although there has reportedly been recent progress in long-running talks aimed at a ceasefire and the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas.

Some Palestinians in the Gaza Strip still have hope the war will end soon. Issam Saqr, a displaced man from Khan Younis, told The Associated Press he hopes the ceasefire "will happen today — before tomorrow!"

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said the number of Israeli soldiers subjected to possible arrest overseas for accusations of war crimes in Gaza is "very limited," despite intense media coverage of a case of a soldier forced to leave Brazil this week due to possible legal action. *—PTI*

Cybertruck attacker used generative AI for blast

WASHINGTON DC, 8 JAN

The highly decorated soldier who exploded a Tesla Cybertruck outside the Trump hotel in Las Vegas used generative AI, including ChatGPT, to plan the attack, Las Vegas police said on Tuesday.

Nearly a week after 37-year-old Matthew Livelsberger fatally shot himself, officials said according to writings, he did not intend to kill anyone else.

An investigation of Livelsberger's searches through ChatGPT indicate he was looking for information on explosive targets, the speed at which certain rounds of ammunition would travel and whether fireworks were legal in Arizona.

Kevin McMahill, sheriff of the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department, called the use of generative AI a "game-changer" and said the department was sharing information with other law enforcement agencies.

An investigation of the attacker's searches through ChatGPT indicate he was looking for information on explosive targets *PHOTO: SCREENGRAB*

"This is the first incident that I'm aware of on US soil where ChatGPT is utilised to help an individual build a particular device," he said. "It's a concerning moment."

In an emailed statement, OpenAI said it was committed to seeing its tools used "responsibly" and that they're designed to refuse harmful instructions.

"In this case, ChatGPT responded with information already publicly available on the internet and provided warnings against harmful or illegal activities," the statement said. *—PTI*

Deportation row: S Korean court clears govt, agency

SEOUL, 8 JAN

A South Korean court on Wednesday cleared the government and an adoption agency of all liability in a lawsuit filed by a 49-year-old Korean man whose traumatic adoption journey led to an abusive childhood in the United States and ultimately his deportation to South Korea in 2016 after legal troubles.

In exonerating the South Korean government over the case of Adam Crapser, whose US adoptive parents never secured his citizenship, the Seoul High Court overturned a 2023 lower court ruling that ordered his adoption agency, Holt Children's Services, to pay him USD 68,600 in damages. The Seoul Central District Court ruled that Holt should have informed his adoptive parents that they needed to take additional steps to secure his citizenship after his adoption was finalized in their state court, but didn't find the government at fault for Crapser's plight. *—PTI*

Yoon's lawyers slam detention; acting leader warns of clash

People protest demanding the arrest of impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk in Seoul *PHOTO: PTI*

SEOUL, 8 JAN

Lawyers for impeached South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol denounced efforts to detain him over his short-lived imposition of martial law, while the country's acting leader expressed concern Wednesday over a possible clash between law enforcement agents and presidential security personnel.

As anti-corruption officials and police prepared another attempt to detain Yoon, the presidential security service fortified Yoon's compound with barbed wire.

Corruption Investigation Office for High-Ranking Officials say they will make a more forceful effort to detain Yoon, warning that they could arrest members of the presidential security staff if they obstruct efforts to seize the embattled president. *—PTI*

Child abusers answerable to God: Pope

ROME, 8 JAN

Pope Francis on Wednesday denounced the "scourge" of child labour and other abuses suffered by children, saying anyone who harms or exploits a child will have to answer to God.

Francis dedicated his first catechism lesson of 2025 to the plight of children, telling his weekly general audience that the faithful cannot remain indifferent to the problem of child labour.

"Children occupy a privileged place in God's heart, and whoever harms them will be accountable to him," he said.

Pope Francis *PHOTO: X*

Francis has frequently decried child labour, especially during his foreign trips. During his 2023 visit to Congo, he denounced how foreign powers and mining interests used children to extract Congo's precious natural resources, saying they were plundering the continent for the "poison of their own greed." "Let us think how many children are dying because of hunger, catastrophes, diseases and wars," he said on Wednesday. "We must firmly prevent and condemn any abuse that minors may suffer." *—PTI*

HELP ARRIVES FOR QUAKE SURVIVORS IN TIBET

BEIJING, 8 JAN

Rescue workers in the cold, high-altitude Tibet region in western China searched for more survivors and victims on Wednesday, one day after a strong earthquake levelled thousands of houses and killed 126 people.

Tents, quilts and other relief items were being delivered to provide shelter for those whose homes are uninhabitable or unsafe.

PHOTO: PTI

Temperatures fell well below freezing overnight in an area with an average altitude of about 4,200 metres.

The confirmed death toll stood at 126 with another 188 injured as of Tuesday evening.

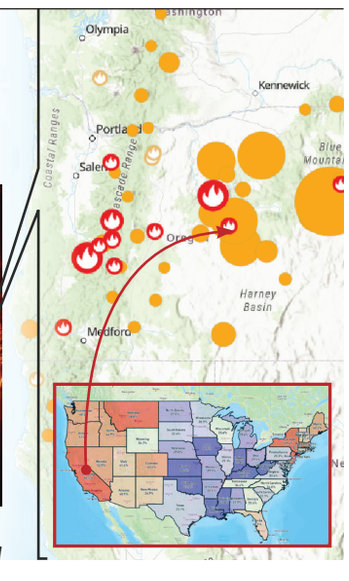
The earthquake struck about 75km from Mount Everest and the border with Nepal, where the shaking sent people running out of their homes in the capital Kathmandu.

The dead included at least 22 of the 222 residents of Gurum, the village's Communist Party chief Tsering Phuntsog said on Tuesday. *—PTI*

SAGA NOMINATIONS POSTPONED

Thousands flee as wildfires rage across LA

LOS ANGELES, 8 JAN



Fire burns a residence on Wednesday in Altadena, California; A firefighter battles the Palisades Fire as it burns a structure in the Pacific Palisades neighborhood of Los Angeles; A map of California shows where active wildfires are burning *PHOTOS: PTI*

California firefighters battled wind-whipped wildfires that raged across the Los Angeles area, destroying homes, clogging roadways as tens of thousands fled and straining resources as officials prepared for the situation to worsen early Wednesday. The flames from a fire that broke out on Tuesday evening near a nature preserve in the inland foothills northeast of LA spread so rapidly that staff at a senior living centre had to push dozens of residents in wheelchairs and hospital beds down the street to a parking lot.

The residents waited in their bedclothes as embers fell around them until ambulances, buses and even construction vans arrived to take them to safety.

Another blaze that started hours earlier ripped through the city's Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, a hillside area along the coast dotted with celebrity residences and memorialised by the Beach Boys in their 1960s hit "Surfin' USA."

Roadways became impassable when scores of people abandoned their vehicles and fled on foot, some toting suitcases.

The traffic jam on Palisades Drive prevented emergency vehicles from getting through and bulldozer was brought in to push the abandoned cars to the side and create a path. Video along the Pacific Coast Highway showed widespread destruction of homes and businesses along the famed roadway. "We looked across and the fire had jumped from one side of the road to the other side of the road," Pacific Palisades resident Kelsey Trainor said. "People were getting out of the cars with their dogs and babies and bags, they were crying and screaming. " Meanwhile, the Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations cancelled an in-person announcement due to devastating wildfires and winds. *—PTI*

Gold revisits ₹80,000 mark; silver rallies ₹500

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Gold prices reclaimed the Rs 80,000-level in the national capital on Wednesday driven by increased buying from jewellers and stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Assocation. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity rose Rs 300 to touch nearly a one-month of Rs 80,000 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 79,700 per 10 grams in the previous session on Tuesday. The price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 300 to Rs 79,600 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 79,300 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Extending its winning run for the third day, silver prices also jumped Rs 500 to hit almost a month high of Rs 92,500 per kg. The white metal had closed at Rs 92,000 per kg in the previous market session. Meanwhile, Comex gold futures slipped 0.09 per cent to USD 2,663.10 per ounce in the international markets. —*PTI*

Vedanta chairman acquires London's Riverside studio

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

The founder and chairman of Vedanta Group Anil Agarwal is the new owner of the iconic Riverside Studio in London, announced a press release on Wednesday. The 100-year-old studio, which is a renowned global centre for arts and located on the north bank of the river Thames in the centre of London, will now operate under the name 'Anil Agarwal Riverside Studios Trust', it informed. Boasting an illustrious history, Riverside Studio has hosted performances and artworks by prestigious artists from across the world including the Beatles, David Bowie, Dario Fo and David Hockney. This foray, according to the statement, highlights Agarwal's personal commitment to fostering creativity and global cultural exchange —*PTI*

Ghaziabad police cracks down on fake OYO hotels

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Travel booking platform OYO on Wednesday said the Ghaziabad Police has sealed over 50 hotels that were 'fraudulently' using its branding. The police have also submitted a report to the licensing authority following a complaint filed by the company against these establishments, OYO said in a statement. In the statement, OYO said, the company and Ghaziabad Police have launched a joint operation to "crack down on unauthorised hotels fraudulently using OYO's branding". The travel tech platform had previously issued legal notices to these hotels, demanding the removal of its branding. On Sunday, PTI reported that the travel tech platform has launched a new check-in policy for partner hotels, starting from Meerut, introducing guidelines effective this year whereby unmarried couples will no longer be welcome to check in —*PTI*

Cybersecurity firm Rubrik announces new office in B'luru

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Cybersecurity firm Rubrik on Wednesday announced its expansion plans in India with the opening of a new office space in Bengaluru. The new facility, which intends to replace the operations of the company's existing two offices in the city over a period of time, is expected to open by mid of 2025. Company co-founder and CEO Bipul Sinha also announced plans to hire talent from India for the expansion. With a global employee count of about 3,000, Rubrik has over 1,000 staff in India. Founded in 2014, Palo Alto headquartered Rubrik commenced its operations in India in 2017. The company went public in April 2024, on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). —*PTI*

Mkts settle lower on muted GDP growth projection

Sensex falls 50.62 points or 0.06% to settle at 78,148.49

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended marginally lower in a volatile session on Wednesday, as investors stayed on the sidelines ahead of the earnings season amid lower economic growth projections.

Unabated foreign fund outflows and mixed global market cues also dented sentiments.

However, buying in bellwether stocks TCS and Reliance Industries managed to restrict a steep decline in markets, traders said.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex fell 50.62 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at 78,148.49. During the day, it dropped 712.32 points or 0.91 per cent to 77,486.79.

The NSE Nifty skidded 18.95 points or 0.08 per cent to 23,688.95.

From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, NTPC and State Bank of India were the major laggards.

NSE Nifty skidded 18.95 points or 0.08 per cent to 23,688.95 *PHOTO: PTI*

Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries, ITC, Asian Paints, HCL Tech and Maruti were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,491.46 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Seoul and Shanghai settled in the positive territory, while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower.

European markets were trading in the green. US markets ended lower on Tuesday.

- From the 30-share blue-chip pack, Adani Ports, UltraTech Cement, Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, NTPC and State Bank of India were the major laggards

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.79 per cent to USD 77.66 a barrel.

The gross domestic product (GDP) rate of 6.4 per cent will be the lowest since the Covid year (2020-21) when the country witnessed a negative growth of 5.8 per cent. It was 9.7 per cent in 2021-22; 7 per cent in 2022-23; and 8.2 per cent in the last fiscal ended March 2024.

The BSE benchmark climbed 234.12 points or 0.30 per cent to settle at 78,199.11 on Tuesday. The Nifty gained 91.85 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,707.90. —*PTI*

AMID HIGHER CRUDE PRICES

Rupee plunges 17P to settle at new record low of 85.91

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

The rupee extended its slide for the second straight session and declined 17 paise to hit a fresh record low of 85.91 against the US dollar on Wednesday amid higher crude oil prices and stronger American currency.

Lacklustre sentiment in domestic equity markets and sustained outflow of foreign funds also played spoilsport even as investors stayed cautious over lower economic growth projection by the government, forex analysts said.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.82 and touched the lowest-ever level of 85.89 against the greenback during intraday. The unit settled at 85.87 (provisional) against the dollar, 13 paise lower than its previous close.

On Tuesday, the rupee settled with a loss of 6 paise at 85.74 against the dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.35 per cent higher at 108.76.

PHOTO: PTI

The 10-year US bond yields also remained elevated at 4.67 per cent amid expectations of delayed interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve.

The latest government data released on Tuesday showed India's economic growth rate is estimated to slip to a four-year low of 6.4 per cent in 2024-25 due to poor show by the manufacturing and services sectors.

The first advance estimates of the national income for 2024-25 released by the National Statistics Office (NSO) is lower than the 6.6 per cent projected by the Reserve Bank in December 2024. —*PTI*

MFI portfolio falls, bad assets spike in Q3

MUMBAI, 8 JAN

Microlending outstandings in the system reduced 4.3 per cent to Rs 4.14 lakh crore in the September quarter as lenders adopted a cautious stance amid deteriorating asset quality, a report said on Wednesday.

Loans unpaid for 1–30 days increased to 2.1 per cent from the 1.2 per cent in June, while the ones unpaid for 31–180 days witnessed a sharper rise at 4.3 per cent as against 2.7 per cent in June, credit information company Crif High Mark said.

The microlending universe has been facing multiple headwinds, and the regulator has blamed industry practices, including multiple lending to the same borrower by different entities and charging usurious interest rates as among the problems.

PHOTO: X

The last few months have seen a drop in collection efficiencies, and the industry has swung into action with corrective steps that are leading to a dip in the overall outstandings.

Data from the credit information company said only non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) grew their portfolio in the September quarter, registering a 0.7 per cent quarter-on-quarter growth, while all others, including banks and small finance banks, saw a decline.

Delinquencies spiked across ticket sizes and lender types, particularly in the top 10 states, it said, adding that Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and Odisha accounted for nearly two-thirds of the incremental bad loans —*PTI*

MICROSOFT AI TOUR

Investment a real entry barrier in AI research, says Nadella

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

India must get into frontier work in artificial intelligence and build foundational models, but investment is a real entry barrier and just one mathematical breakthrough can change entire dynamics, Microsoft Chairman and CEO Satya Nadella said here on Wednesday.

During his second day of Microsoft India AI Tour, Nadella said that India can do great work in the area of Indic languages and transforming its industries using artificial intelligence.

"There's no reason why India can't do frontier work, but you can even define frontier pretty unique. So for example, I don't think the last known big breakthrough in AI frontier has happened. I always say we are one mathematical breakthrough away from that entire edifice being thrown out and being going after something else," Nadella said.

Satya Nadella

He said academics in India, the research institutions, including Microsoft Research, are very fantastic math team and algorithms team.

"Let's not be bound, quite frankly, with what is considered frontier. So I would say India definitely should also do frontier work," Nadella said.

In response to a question by additional secretary in the IT ministry Abhishek Singh on whether India should build its own AI foundational model, Nadella said that India always has an option to do that, but the real entry barrier in making foundational models is investment.

He said the other way to look at the investment barrier is to lower the cost through research, which is always open for India. —*PTI*

NRAI seeks industry status for food sector

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) on Wednesday asked the government to grant industry status to the food services sector while seeking an equitable and fair e-commerce policy to provide a level-playing field to protect restaurants, delivery partners and consumers from potentially exploitative practices of platforms.

In its pre-Budget recommendations, National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) said restaurants should be allowed to operate for longer hours, and also sought targeted subsidy schemes and access to debt financing for SMEs.

NRAI said the industry is expected to reach Rs 7,76,511 crore and grow at an 8.1 per cent CAGR by 2028, making it the third-largest food services market globally.

"Given the size (and) immense contribution of the food services industry to the country's economy, it should be accorded an industry status," NRAI said.

Industry status helps in getting lower utility tariffs, reduced taxes, easier access to finance, and softer loans.—*PTI*

UFC prez Dana joins Meta's Board of Directors

SAN FRANCISCO, 8 JAN

Social media giant Meta announced the appointment of three new members to its board of directors, including Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) president Dana White, a close ally of US President-elect Donald Trump.

The new appointments come as Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg strengthens ties with the incoming Trump administration. Zuckerberg recently donated $1 million to Trump's inauguration fund and attended a private dinner with Trump at the Mar-a-Lago resort in November.

These moves appear to signal efforts to rebuild Meta's relationship with the

President-elect after a contentious past.

Trump has previously criticised Meta and Zuckerberg, accusing the company of liberal bias and suppressing conservative voices. Trump was banned from Facebook following the 6 January, 2021, Capitol attack, though his account was reinstated in early 2023.

Dana White, a longtime Trump ally, expressed enthusiasm about his new role. "I've never been interested in joining a board of directors until I got the offer to join Meta's board. I am a huge believer that social media and AI are the future," White said. His two-decade friendship with Trump began when Trump offered venues for early UFC events.

Meta also appointed Republican stalwart Joel Kaplan to head its public affairs, replacing former British Deputy Prime Minister Nick. —*Agencies*

MakeMyTrip allows partial payment

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Travel booking platform MakeMyTrip on Wednesday announced it has introduced a part payment option for travellers to get a confirmed booking on international flights by paying between 10 to 40 per cent of the total fare upfront. The exact percentage of the upfront payment will be determined by factors such as the airline, travel sector, and the advance purchase window.

The remaining balance must be paid either before the travel date or within 45 days of booking, whichever comes first, at no additional cost.

"This industry-first feature addresses a common pain point for travellers, particularly larger families or groups, who may find it challenging to pay the entire ticket amount upfront when booking an international flight.

Users opting for the part payment option can modify their confirmed bookings after completing the full payment as per fare rules," MakeMyTrip said in a statement. The initial response has been encouraging, with adoption observed among solo travellers, pairs, and families for long-haul and short-haul international flights. —*PTI*

- The exact percentage of the upfront payment will be determined by factors such as the airline, travel sector etc

Proposed duty sparks steel price hike

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Steel prices in 2025 would be much higher than the last year if the proposed safeguard duty on steel imports is imposed by the end of next month, rating agency Crisil said on Wednesday.

"Domestic prices are expected to remain soft in 2025. Prices have a 4–6 per cent upside potential hinged on implementation of the safeguard duty. "As mills ramp up production volume from the newly commissioned capacities, increase in supply will reduce flat steel prices, but will still be higher than average price of 2024. That said, intense competition among mills to gain market share could limit the upward movement," Vishal Singh, Director-Research at Crisil Market Intelligence and Analytics, said in a statement.

PHOTO: X

The safeguard duty proposed by the industry could be a positive here. Assuming it is implemented by the end of February, steel prices in 2025 would be much higher than 2024, with the impact more prominent in first half. —*PTI*

WEF REPORT

Farm workers, drivers largest growing jobs

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Farm workers and drivers will figure among the fastest growing jobs over the next five years, while roles of cashiers and ticket clerks will see the largest decline, a new study showed on Wednesday.

In its Future of Jobs Report 2025, the World Economic Forum (WEF) also said that 170 million new jobs will be created by 2030, while 92 million are projected to be displaced, resulting in 78 million net new jobs.

The report, released days before the WEF Annual Meeting in Davos from January 20-25, said that job disruption will equate to 22 per cent of jobs by 2030.

PHOTO:X

Technological advancements, demographic shifts, geoeconomic tensions, and economic pressures are the key drivers of these changes, reshaping industries and professions worldwide.

Drawing on data from over 1,000 companies, the study found that the skills gap continues to be the most significant barrier to business transformation today. Nearly 40 per cent of skills required on the job are set to change, and 63 per cent of employers already cite it as key barrier they face.

Technology skills in AI, big data, and cyber security are expected to see rapid growth in demand, but human skills, such as creative thinking, resilience, flexibility and agility will remain critical.

Frontline roles and essential sectors are set for the highest job growth by 2030, while advances in AI and renewable energy are reshaping the market – driving an increase in demand for many technology or specialist roles, while driving a decline for others.

Trends such as generative AI and rapid technological shifts are upending industries and labour markets, creating both unprecedented opportunities and profound risks. —*PTI*

Commerce ministry cuts Nov gold imports data to $9.84B

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

The commerce ministry has revised downwards the gold import data by USD 5 billion to USD 9.84 billion for November, according to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS).

The DGCIS is an arm of the Ministry of Commerce.

As per the ministry data released last month, the country's gold imports in November reached a record high of USD 14.86 billion, registering a four-fold increase.

Noticing this unusual surge, the commerce ministry was examining if there were any calculation mistake in the compilation of the gold imports data for the month, as the sharp surge pushed the trade deficit to a record last month.

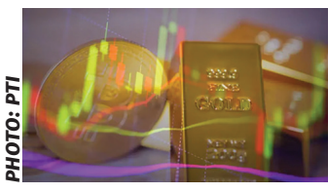


PHOTO: PTI

The jump in gold imports pushed the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) to a record USD 37.84 billion in November.

Kolkata-based DGCIS is an organisation for the collection, compilation and dissemination of India's trade statistics and commercial information. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

New AFI President rose through ranks to top post

CHANDIGARH, 8 JAN

A product of the inaugural junior national camp in 1989-90, the new Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president Bahadur Singh Sagoo has risen through the ranks to first achieve success as a sportsperson and then to the top administrative post. The 51-year-old, who hails from Jalandhar and is currently serving as commandant in the Punjab Police, won a shot put gold at the 2002 Asian Games and also represented the country in the 2000 and 2004 Olympics. His first international success came in 1992, when he won a gold medal in discus throw at the Asian Junior Championships in New Delhi. He later switched to shot put in 1994. Sagoo's lifetime best in shot put stands at 20.40m, with his gold medal throw at the 2002 Asian Games measuring 19.03m. —*PTI*

Indian riders join Gaman racing, head to Spain for training

CHENNAI, 8 JAN

Promising Indian riders Geoffrey Emmanuel, Kavin Quintal, Johann Emmanuel and Nadine Balaji have joined Gaman Racing and the quartet will be training in Spain ahead of the 2025 season. The Spanish racing giants inked a deal with Gusto Racing India in this regard, and Geoffrey, Kavin, and Johann will train at MotorLand Aragon, Gaman Racing's state-of-the-art facility in Spain. The four riders achieved notable milestones in 2024, where Geoffrey competed in the Moto2 European Championship at FIM JuniorGP, with five podiums in the Supersport 600 class at the Qatar Superstock Championship (QSTK). Kavin became the first Indian rider in WorldSBK's Supersport 300 class, and achieved success in the FIM JuniorGP STK class. —*PTI*

Guwahati to host return leg Kolkata derby on Saturday

KOLKATA, 8 JAN

Defending Shield winners Mohun Bagan Super Giant on Wednesday confirmed that their 11 January return-leg Indian Super League derby against arch-rivals East Bengal has been moved to Guwahati owing to inadequate security arrangements. The change in venue comes after the Bidhannagar Police, under whose jurisdiction the Salta Lake Stadium falls, cited concerns over inadequate security because of the Gangasagar Mela from 10 to 18 January. With the derby's fate shrouded in uncertainty, the Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL), the body managing the ISL, opted to retain the original date while shifting the match to the Indira Gandhi Stadium in Guwahati. —*PTI*

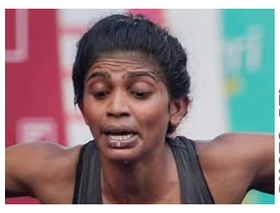


PHOTO: PTI

Runner Archana flunks dope test, gets suspension

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

India's long distance runner Archana Jadhav has been handed a provisional suspension for flunking a dope test, the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) has announced. The 20-year-old Jadhav had last competed in the Delhi half marathon in October 2024 in the elite Indian women's race, finishing fourth with a time of 1:20.21 behind winner Lili Das, Kavita Yadav and Priti Lamba. According to AIU, Jadhav's sample contained prohibited substance Oxandrolone, which is an androgen and synthetic anabolic steroid (AAS). —*PTI*

AFI PICKS 6 WOMEN, 3 MEN FOR COMMISSION

Anju named chairperson; Neeraj joins as prominent member

CHANDIGARH, 8 JAN

Long-jump great Anju Bobby George was on Wednesday named chairperson of the Athletics Federation of India's nine-strong athletes commission that features six women with javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra being its most prominent male member.

The other women in the new panel are runner Jyotirmoyee Sikdar, discus thrower Krishna Poonia, hurdler MD Valsamma, steeplechaser Sudha Singh and runner Sunita Rani. George, a 2003 world championships bronze-winner, is also a senior vice president in the AFI.

All of them are retired and their induction is a noteworthy milestone in the AFI's quest for gender parity in its set-up. The previous commission featured four women.

Long-jump great Anju Bobby George PHOTO: PTI

The commission was unveiled on Wednesday after the elections held in October last year.

Two-time Olympic medal-winning Neeraj Chopra is one of the four nominated members after consultations by the AFI's executive council.

The other two male members of the commission are 3000m steeplechaser Avinash Sable and newly-elected AFI president Bahadur Singh Sagoo, a shot put gold medal winner at 2002 Asian Games. Sagoo was the chairman of the previous commission.

Outgoing AFI treasurer Madhu Kant Pathak, who was the returning officer for the elections, said the polls were held after following due process.

Outgoing AFI President Adille Sumariwalla will continue to be a part of the executive council as an ex-officio member as he is a part of the World Athletics Council.

In another decision, Indian athletics' first major national senior championships of the season -- the Federation Cup -- will be held in Kozhikode, Kerala, from 21-24 April. —*PTI*

Malaysia Open: Prannoy, Malvika enter pre-quarters

KUALA LUMPUR, 8 JAN

India's number two shuttler HS Prannoy and rising shuttler Malvika Bansod advanced to the pre-quarterfinals of the Malaysia Open after winning their respective men's and women's singles opening round matches here on Wednesday.

There was more delight for the Indian camp with the pairs of Tanisha Crasto/Dhruv Kapila and Sathish Kumar Karunakaran/Aadya Variyath sailing into the mixed doubles pre-quarterfinals of the Super 1000 meet.

Overcoming a delay caused by water leaking from the roof, Prannoy eliminated his Canadian rival Brian Yang 21-12, 17-21, 21-15.

Persistent leakage had caused suspension of the match on Tuesday with Yang leading 11-9 in the second game.

Despite conceding the second game, Prannoy maintained composure to seal the decider in a match lasting one-hour 29 minutes.

India's number two shuttler HS Prannoy PHOTO: PTI

Prannoy will next face seventh seeded Shi Feng Li of China who ousted Priyanshu Rajawat 21-11, 21-16.

Malvika breezed past local favourite Goh Jin Wei 21-15, 21-16 in just 45 minutes. She will face the winner of Chinese third seed Yue Han and Yu Po Pai of South Korea.

In other Indian results, Kapila and Crasto defeated South Korea's Sung Hyun Ko and Hye Won Eom 21-13, 21-14. They will face seventh seeded Chinese pair Xing Cheng and Chi Zhang in the last-16. —*PTI*

Konstas regrets stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah

SYDNEY, 8 JAN

Australia's teenage batting sensation Sam Konstas regrets his stand-off with Jasprit Bumrah during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, admitting he was only trying to waste time but ultimately, the Indian pace spearhead had the "last laugh".

Konstas made an impact in the final two Tests of the series with his audacious stroke play, but also found himself at the centre of a couple of fiery exchanges with Indian stars Bumrah and Virat Kohli.

One incident occurred on the opening day of the fifth Test. Near the end of the day's play, Bumrah, looking to get in one more over, was met with resistance from the Australian players, who were trying to waste time. —*PTI*

PCB moved ODI tri-series from Multan to Karachi & Lahore PHOTO: X

Champions Trophy likely to be moved out of Pak

LAHORE, 8 JAN

The Pakistan Cricket Board on Wednesday moved the ODI tri-series, also involving South Africa and New Zealand, from Multan to Karachi and Lahore, dismissing the talks about a delay in renovation work at those venues ahead of next month's Champions Trophy.

The triangular series is a curtain raiser to the ICC showpiece which begins from 19 February in Karachi.

PCB said preparations for the Champions Trophy are in full swing with the renovation work at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore and the National Bank Stadium in Karachi set to be completed before or around the deadlines.

"This decision reflects the PCB's confidence in the readiness of these upgraded venues and their ability to deliver a world-class experience for players, officials, and fans alike," the PC B added.

After the upgrades, spectator capacity at the Gaddafi Stadium has been increased to 35,000, with new chairs installed throughout the venue.

Additionally, 480 state-of-the-art LED lights have been installed to enhance broadcast LUX levels, ensuring superior viewing quality for fans worldwide. —*PTI*

Shastri wants Rohit, Kohli to play Ranji Trophy

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

Former India head coach Ravi Shastri wants the struggling Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli to get back to playing Ranji Trophy. He said the Test future of the two superstars is dependent on their hunger to maintain their excellence in the game.

The repeated failures of the star Indian duo in the Border-Gavaskar trophy contributed to the visitors' series loss.

India head coach Gautam Gambhir underlined the importance of playing in domestic cricket following the loss and Shastri too feels Rohit and Kohli should return to playing Ranji Trophy even though the next series is in June.

"If there is a gap for them, they should go back and play some domestic cricket and see how it is. Because when you play Test match cricket for that length of time, it's important to play domestic cricket for two reasons," Shastri said during a conversation alongside Australian

Former Australian captain Ponting also feels time has come for Kohli to get away from the game following his constant troubles outside the off-stump over the course of the five Test series Down Under.

"I can see it with Virat now, you can see how much he wants it. He's trying so hard that actually makes batting harder. The harder you try sometimes with batting, the less success you're going to have," he said. —*PTI*

10 WEIGHT CATEGORIES

BFI adopts World Boxing's weight classes

BAREILLY, 8 JAN

The Boxing Federation of India (BFI) is conducting the men's national championships in the country in 10 weight categories, in line with the classification introduced by the breakaway World Boxing.

The ongoing event is being held under World Boxing's Technical and Competition Rules, which has 10 instead of the 13 weight categories that feature in the suspended International Boxing Association's (IBA) roster.

The new weight classes are 50kg (Flyweight), 55kg (Bantamweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight), 85kg (Cruiserweight), 90kg (Heavyweight) and +90kg (Super Heavyweight).

Out of these, six categories – 55kg, 60kg, 65kg, 70kg, 80kg and 90kg – are marked as potential Olympics weight categories.

The new categories for women are 48kg (Light Flyweight), 51kg (Flyweight), 54kg (Bantamweight), 57kg (Featherweight), 60kg (Lightweight), 65kg (Welterweight), 70kg (Light Middleweight), 75kg (Middleweight), 80kg (Light Heavyweight) and +81kg.

World Boxing is a breakaway international body aiming to secure recognition from the International Olympic Committee and ensure that boxing remains on the Olympic roster.

Formed in April last year after the International Boxing Association was stripped of its status, WB has managed to pull in requisite 60 members and the IOC is expected to take a call on its recognition early next year.

Devendra Solanki of Rajasthan kicked off the tournament in style, defeating Donald Winston Janumala. —*PTI*

ICC rates 4 pitches for BGT 'very good'

SYDNEY, 8 JAN

Four out of five pitches used in the recent Border-Gavaskar Test series between India and Australia have been rated "very good" by the ICC, which found the track for the fifth and final game in Sydney to be "satisfactory".

The marquee five-match series ended 3–1 in favour of the hosts, who regained the Border Gavaskar Trophy after a decade and also qualified for the World Test Championship final in June against South Africa.

"The pitches at Perth Stadium, Adelaide Oval, Gabba and Melbourne Cricket Ground – the venues for the first four Tests – were rated as 'very good'," the ICC said in a statement.

The traditionally batting-friendly pitch at the Sydney Cricket Ground favoured bowlers this time. Batters from both the teams struggled for the majority of the Test which ended in two and half days.

"We encourage pitches that bring out the unique characteristics of that venue, and this has long been a feature of cricket," Australia's Head of Cricket Operations Peter Roach said. —*PTI*

Deschamps plans exit after 2026 World Cup

PARIS, 8 JAN

Didier Deschamps announced on Wednesday that he will not continue as France coach after the next World Cup, bringing an end to an era in which he became the nation's most successful manager over more than a decade.

The 56-year-old said in an interview with broadcaster TF1 that he will leave when his contract expires in the summer of 2026.

"I've been here since 2012, I'm scheduled to be here until 2026, the next World Cup, but that's where it's going to end because it has to end at some point," Deschamps said in excerpts of the interview to be aired later Wednesday.

"I did my time, with the same desire and the same passion to keep the French team at the highest level, but 2026 is all very well."

France lost the 2022 World Cup to Argentina. —*PTI*

WHITE-BALL LEGEND

NZ's Martin Guptill retires from international cricket

NEW DELHI, 8 JAN

New Zealand batter Martin Guptill on Wednesday announced his retirement from international cricket, though the 38-year-old will continue to play in the T20 leagues around the world.

Currently, Guptill, who last played for New Zealand in 2022, is leading the Auckland Aces in this season's Super Smash.

"As a young kid it was always my dream to play for New Zealand and I feel incredibly lucky and proud to have played 367 games for my country," Guptill said in a statement issued by the New Zealand Cricket.

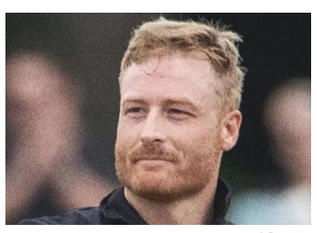


PHOTO: X/@ICC

"I will forever cherish the memories made wearing the silver fern alongside a great group of guys," he added.

Guptill has played 47 Tests but the white ball format was his calling card. He scored 7346 runs from 198 matches with 18 hundreds and 39 fifties.

The right-hander also appeared in 122 T20I for the Blackcaps, making 3531 runs with two hundreds and 20 fifties.

Guptill is the first Kiwi player to score a hundred on ODI debut and he also became the first New Zealander to score an ODI double-century during the ICC World Cup 2015 when he smashed 237 in the quarter-final win over the West Indies at Wellington.

Among the most memorable moment for him as a fielder was his stunning direct hit run-out of Mahendra Singh Dhoni during New Zealand's semifinal win over India at the 2019 World Cup in England. —*PTI*

Prasidh, Devdutt, Washington in Hazare knockouts

BENGALURU, 8 JAN

Karnataka's Prasidh Krishna, Devdutt Padikkal and Tamil Nadu all-rounder Washington Sundar will be available for the Vijay Hazare Trophy knockout matches, starting in Vadodara from Thursday, after featuring in the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy series against Australia.

However, KL Rahul, who played all five Test matches against the Aussies, has requested for a break and will skip the Hazare knockouts.

Rahul's availability for the second phase of the Ranji Trophy, from on January 23, will be decided at a later date. —*PTI*

Musk interested in buying Liverpool, says dad

LOS ANGELES, 8 JAN

Elon Musk's father says his billionaire son has expressed interest in buying English soccer club Liverpool.

The Premier League club is privately owned by Fenway Sports Group, which has not indicated it wants to sell but has accepted external investment in the past.

Errol Musk, in an interview with Times Radio, acknowledged that the Tesla CEO has shown an interest in the six-time European Cup champions.

"Oh yes, but that doesn't mean he's buying it," Errol Musk said. "He would like to, yes, obviously, anybody would want to. So would I."

He also said: "I can't comment on that. They'll raise the price."

When contacted by The Associated Press, a spokesperson for FSG said there was "No truth to these rumors."

In September 2023, FSG sold a minority stake to U.S. investment firm Dynasty Equity.

Under FSG, Liverpool has re-established itself as one of the leading clubs in Europe. The Merseyside club won its first English league title in 30 years in 2020 — one season after winning the Champions League title. It leads the Premier League and Champions League this season.

Elon Musk has gotten himself involved in British politics since the center-left Labour Party was elected in July. Musk has used his social network, X, to call for a new election. —*PTI*